SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

HIS LIFE AND LEGACY

Swami Vivekananda:
His Life and Legacy

By

Swami Tapasyananda

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LIFE AND LEGACY OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

CHAPTER I

LIFE OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

The spiritual and the family backgrounds

"Swami Vivekananda saved Hinduism and saved India. But for him, we would have lost our religion and would not have gained our freedom. We therefore owe everything to Swami Vivekananda. May his faith, his courage and his wisdom ever inspire us, so that we may keep safe the treasures we have received from him." These words of Sri C. Rajagopalachari, the noted patriot and statesman-philosopher of India, indeed put in a nut-shell the tremendous contribution Swami Vivekananda has made to the national life of India and for the preservation of the Hindu religion. But the Swami's greatness transcends all worldly achievements. These were only a very partial expression of his transcendent greatness, an idea of which we get from a vision his Great Master, Sri

Ramakrishna, had about him even before the two met. The Master said about this vision: "One day I saw that, through Samadhi, my mind was going up by a luminous path. Going beyond the gross world studded with the sun, the moon and the stars, it entered first of all into the subtle world of ideas. The more it began to enter into subtler and subtler strata of that realm, the more did I see beautiful forms of deities existing on both sides of the path. It came gradually to the last extremity of that region. I saw a barrier of light there separating the realm of the Divisible from that of the Indivisible. Leaping over it, the mind entered by degrees the realm of the Indivisible. I saw that there was no more any person or form or thing there having a form. As if afraid to enter there, even the gods and goddesses possessing heavenly bodies exercised their authority only over realms far below. But the very next moment I saw seven wise Rishis having bodies consisting of Divine Light only, seated there in Samadhi. I felt that in virtue and knowledge, love and renunciation they had excelled even the gods and goddesses, not to speak of human beings.

Astonished, I was pondering over their greatness when I saw before me that a part of the homogeneous mass of Light of the Abode of the Indivisible, devoid of the slightest tinge of difference, had become solidified and converted into the form of a Divine Child. Coming down to one of those Rishis, and throwing its soft and delicate arms round his neck, the Divine Child embraced him, and afterwards, calling him with its ambrosial words, sweeter than the music of the Veena, made great efforts to wake him up from his Samadhi. The Rishi woke up at that delicate and loving touch and looked at the wonderful Child with half-shut eyes, free from winking. Seeing his bright face full of delight at the sight of the Child, I thought that the Child was the treasure of his heart, and that their familiarity was a matter of eternity. The extraordinary Divine Child then expressed infinite joy and said to him, 'I am going, you must come with me.' The Rishi said nothing at that request, but his loving eyes expressed his hearty assent. Afterwards, looking on the Child with loving eyes, he entered again into Samadhi. Astonished, I then saw that a part of the mind and body of that Rishi, converted into the form of a bright Light, came down to the earth along the reverse path. Hardly had I seen Narendra (i.e. Swami Vivekananda of later days) for the first time when I knew he was that Rishi." Asked one day about the identity of the Child of the vision, the Master disclosed that it was he himself.

Leaving aside this supra-sensual background of the personality known as Swami Vivekananda, his worldly origin has to be traced to the ancient and well-known Kayastha family of Dattas of Calcutta. Rammohan Datta, the great grandfather of the Swami, was a flourishing lawyer in that city. He had amassed much wealth and commanded great respect too in society. His son Durga Charan, though an inheritor of immense wealth, developed spiritual interest from his boyhood, and renounced worldly life to become a Sannyasin in his youth, leaving behind a young son Viswanath aged three to perpetuate the line. Of Viswanath Datta and his wife Bhuvaneswari was born Narendranath Datta, who became famous under the name of Swami Vivekananda. Unlike his father who had renounced worldly life and become a Sannyasin, Viswanath was not spiritually inclined. But he was a noble-minded gentleman and a connoisseur of music and other fine arts. A master of English and Persian, he was fond of the Bible and the works of the Persian poet Hafiz. Though he was of a grave and serious demeanour, he was possessed of wit and humour. He was above all noted for his generosity, which made him spend lavishly for others and bring that wealthy family to the verge of poverty at his demise.

Narendranath was born of him and Bhuvaneswari on the 12th of January 1863. It is said that, the family being devoid of any male child, the mother Bhuvaneswari made special worship of Lord Vireswara (Siva) of Kasi, and that Narendra was born as a result of her prayer to the Lord.

As a boy of extraordinary promise

Indications of future greatness were conspicuous in him from his very childhood. He was a very high-spirited and restless child. He was sometimes given to fits of temper for which his mother found a strange remedy. It was to put him under a tap and chant Siva's name. As he grew up, he showed signs of an extraordinarily generous nature. Whenever a beggar or a mendicant called at his house for alms, he readily gave away even valuable things of his house. He was fond of pet animals and birds and had several such dumb companions, some of them being a cow, a goat, a monkey, a peacock, a pigeon, and two or three guinea pigs. To his young imagination, the coachman with his whip was the most admirable hero. Among the boys of his group, he was the object of their admiration and always their leader. In his favourite game of the 'King and the Court', he invariably played the part of the King, and appointed others as officers.

Even in his very early days he showed signs of an exceptional intelligence and of a prodigious memory. In his early childhood he learnt by heart the genealogy of his ancestors, hymns to gods and goddesses and the aphorisms of the Sanskrit grammar *Mugdhabodha* by hearing them recited every evening, sitting on the lap of an old relative. He learnt his lessons from his private tutor in an extraordinary way. He would show in his English and Bengali books the particular lessons to be learnt according to the direction he got from his school. The tutor was to read it two or three times, as if he was studying it himself. Naren listened to the reading, lying or sitting. That was enough for him to master the lesson.

At school, he used to neglect his class lessons during the early part of the academic year and utilise his time for doing extra-reading. In the last three months he would study his texts and get high marks. The leisure thus got he utilised for the study of extra books on different subjects at different times. For example, before his Entrance Examination he felt a desire to study Indian History and completed the study of all important books on the subject. As a student attending the F. A. Course, he mastered one by one all available books in English on Logic, and while reading for the B.A. examination he felt a strong inclination to study the histories of England and other European countries. He read many authoritative works on the ancient and modern histories of Europe, besides several books on Western philosophy. He was able to finish all these books so rapidly, because of his extraordinary way of study. He could grasp the contents of a page by reading a few sentences here and there. When put to test by unbelieving friends, he was able to give proper answers to any question put to him on the contents of the book he claimed to have read in this fashion. As a result of this method of rapid study, he became a scholar of vast erudition and great powers of argumentation even as a student.

Not only in his intellectual capacities, but also in qualities of the heart like resourcefulness, courage, self-confidence etc., he showed striking signs of excellence even in his boyhood. As a boy, he along with his companions, was in the habit of indulging in a dangerous play of swinging on the branch of a tree with head downwards. An old relative who wanted to wean away the boys from the risky play, tried to frighten them by declaring that a fierce spirit was residing on that tree and would break their necks if they climbed it. While all the other boys were frightened by the ghost story, Naren, after hearing it politely, got up the tree immediately after the old man turned his back, and began to swing as before. He called the other boys fools to have believed the story of the old uncle. For, if it were true, the spirit should have broken their necks several times already, as they had been indulging in this sport many a time. A remarkably precocious challenge from a boy of tender years ! As he grew up he evinced great interest and gained considerable skill in various kinds of physical exercise like gymnastics, wrestling, boxing, sword-play and swimming.

Once, with some companions, he was on a short trip in a hired boat. On their return journey, one of the boys became sick and vomited in the boat. In spite of the boys offering extra payment, the boatmen insisted that they would not permit the boys to land unless they washed and cleansed the boat. They even threatened to beat the boys. In this predicament the resourceful Naren managed to escape from the boat. He saw on the river bank two European soldiers passing by. With a few English words and by gestures he made them understand the situation. The soldiers intervened on behalf of the boys, and the boatmen had to let them go.

Another such act of courage and resourcefulness of his was evinced when he and his friends went to see a gigantic man-of-war of the British navy that had called at the port of Calcutta. When denied admission to the room of the officer who issued tickets to visitors for seeing the ship, Naren found out a backside staircase and got into the officer's room and managed to get the ticket. Another incident revealing his courage and resourcefulness took place when a head injury was caused to a British sailor who came to the help of Naren and his companions in erecting a heavy-wooden frame for a trapeze. While most of the boys ran away for fear of the police, Naren and two or three companions stood by the sailor, dressed his wound, made arrangements for his nursing for a few days and finally sent him away with the presentation of a purse.

Early indication of spiritual greatness

While the above-described qualities of head and heart marked Naren out as a budding many-sided genius, what distinguished him most from others was his rare spiritual excellence. Even in boyhood he displayed great powers of concentration.

As a young boy he was one day playing at meditation with some companions in a closed room. Not finding the boy anywhere for a long time, the people of the house began to search everywhere and at last came to the closed room. They broke open into it, whereupon the other boys fled, while Naren remained absorbed in meditation without any awareness of what was taking place around him. As his Great Master said later on, he was born perfect in meditation.

He always went to sleep in a peculiar way. As soon as he closed his eyes to sleep, he was aware of a luminous glow into which he felt himself dissolving. He thought till he reached more mature years that it was the way in which all people went to sleep. At that young age Narendra discovered, even without the advice of anyone, that meditation was the best way for realising God, and he used to practise meditation regularly in a bolted room without anybody's knowledge. In 1877 when Narendra was about fourteen, he had to take his family to Raipur where his father had gone for a long stay. Much of the travelling had to be done in bullock carts through the thick forests of the Vindhyan ranges. Stimulated by the wonderful beauty of Nature surrounding him, the naturally meditative mind of Narendra brought him one day to the verge of Samadhi. Describing it to his companions in later days, he said: "What I saw and felt when going through the forest has for ever remained firmly imprinted in my memory, particularly a certain event of one day. That day we had to travel by a mountain road passing through a valley of the Vindhyan ranges, whose peaks, rising very high in the sky, were overlooking it from both the sides. Bending under the weight of their fruits and flowers, various kinds of trees and creepers covered the mountain slopes in their matchless beauty. Birds were flying from arbour to arbour or down on the ground in search of food, filling the quarters with their sweet notes. I saw all bullock carts arriving at a place where two mountain peaks, coming forward as in love, locked themselves up in an embrace over the narrow forest path. Observing carefully below their meeting point, I saw that there was a very big cleft from the crest of the foot of the mountain on one side of the path, and filling that cleft, there was hanging in it an enormous honey-comb the result of the labour of the bees for ages. Filled with wonder, as I was pondering over the beginning and the end of that kingdom of bees, my mind became so much absorbed in the thought of the infinite power of God, the Controller of the three worlds, that I completely lost my consciousness of the external world for some time. I do not remember how long I was lying in the bullock cart in that condition. When I regained normal consciousness, I found that we had crossed that place and come far away. As I was alone in the cart, no one could know any thing about these happenings" (Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master, Vol. II. P.836). This was perhaps his first experience of the mystic consciousness called Samadhi.

Period of intellectual struggle and meeting with the Master

It took, however, a long time and a fierce inner struggle before Narendranath's keen intellect and his inherent spirituality could get integrated into that mighty personality that the world came to know as

Swami Vivekananda in later times. For, as he grew up into a young man, while reading in the Presidency college and even earlier, he came to study and absorb the philosophies of many a Western thinker and the methods and conclusions of modern science. In general the trends of thought represented by them were mostly agnostic in respect of their attitude towards the spiritual verity. The force of the purely rational approach of Western science and philosophy profoundly influenced the keen intellect of Narendra and made him question many of the spiritual truths which he had taken for granted in his pre-adolescent life. To add to this intellectual struggle there was at that time the reform movement represented by the Brahmo Samaj in Bengal. The Hindu social system and the widely accepted conceptions of God, image worship etc., were questioned by the Brahmos, whose criticism of Hinduism was eloquently placed before the youth by teachers like Keshab Chandra Sen and Sivanath Sastri. Naren was powerfully influenced by the thought currents set in motion by Brahmoism, which advocated the pursuit of Western social ideals and the adoption of the Christian pattern of devotion.

The staunch votary of the intellect that he was, he adopted under the influence of these thought currents the attitude of a pure rationalist and agnostic, and openly challenged the Hindu idea of deities and practices like image worship. But his inherent spiritual nature, however, made him stick to the practice of meditation. However much the pure intellectualism of western philosophy and science appealed to him, he was aware of their inherent weakness. He felt that they were attempting to do with the intellect what it cannot do, namely, give a first hand knowledge of the Supreme Truth which spiritualists call God. There must be another way of intuitively apprehending Him who is beyond the power of pure rationalism. The question whether God can be directly experienced or not therefore became a question of life and death for him. So began his quest for religious leaders of the time, mainly the luminaries of the Brahmo Samaj, to know whether they had a direct experience of God. One day in great excitement he went to Maharshi Devendranath Tagore with the question "Have you seen God?" The Maharshi was much surprised, but gave no direct answer. He lovingly seated Naren by his side, gave him many good instructions and said: "The characteristics of a Yogi are manifest in you. If you practise meditation, you will soon experience the results of it."

It was this quest of Narendranath for one who had direct experience of God that brought him finally to Sri Ramakrishna. Naren heard of him first from Principal William Hastie of his college who mentioned Sri Ramakrishna's name as one who passed into ecstasies, while explaining the meaning of ecstasy in one of Wordsworth's poems. He next heard of the Great Master from a close relative, Ramachandra Datta. It was when Narendra refused to accept attractive proposals of marriage at this time out of his spiritual yearning that Ramachandra told him: "If you have a real desire to realize God, then come to the Master at Dakshineswar instead of visiting Brahmo Samaj and other places." Shortly after, he happened to meet the Master for the first time at a religious festival at the house of Surendranath Mitra, where, being a good musician, he was invited to sing religious songs on a day of the Master's visit there. Much pleased with the song, Sri Ramakrishna made enquiries about the young singer. Then he went near Naren, and making a close observation of his physiognomy, invited him to visit him at Dakshineswar. This visit took place in November 1881 in the company of Surendranath Mitra, who persuaded Narendra that day to accompany him to Dakshineswar.

What took place at the meeting made it a red letter day in Naren's life. The Master asked him to sit on a mat and sing a devotional song, which put him into an ecstasy. After that, the Master took him to a side verandah room and closed the door. What happened is described as follows in Swami Saradananda's *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master* (Vol. II, P. 825) in Naren's own words: "As soon as he entered the verandah, the Master closed the door of the room. I thought he might perhaps give me some instruction in private. But what he said and did was beyond imagination. He suddenly caught hold of my hand and shed profuse tears of joy. Addressing me affectionately like one already familiar, he said: 'Is it proper that you should come so late? Should you not have even once thought how I was waiting for you? Hearing continuously the idle talk of worldly people, my ears are about to be scorched. Not having any one to whom I can communicate my innermost feelings, I am about to burst.' And so he went on raving and weeping. The next moment he stood before me with folded palms, and showering on me the regard due to a divine being, went on saying: 'I know, my Lord, you are the ancient Rishi Nara, a part of Narayana, who has incarnated himself this time to remove the miseries and sufferings of humanity !'

"I was absolutely nonplussed and thought: 'He is, I see, completely insane. Why should he otherwise speak in this strain to me, who is really the son of Viswanath Datta?' However, I kept silent, and the wonderful mad man went on speaking whatever he liked. The next moment he asked me to wait there and entered the room, and bringing some butter, candy and Sandesh, began to feed me with his own hand . . . . He then caught hold of my hand and said, 'Promise you will come again to see me soon, all alone.' Unable to evade that earnest request, I had to say 'I shall', and then I entered the room with him and sat down beside my companions.

"I went on observing him closely and could find no trace of madness in his deportment, conversation or behaviour towards others. Impressed by his fine talk and ecstasy, I thought that he was truly a man of renunciation who had given up all for God and practised personally what he professed. 'God,' he said, 'can be seen and spoken with, just as I am seeing you and speaking with you; but who wants to do so? People grieve and shed potfuls of tears at the death of their wives and sons, and behave in the same way for the sake of money or property. But who does so because he cannot realise God? If anyone is in truth equally anxious to see Him and calls on Him with a longing heart, He certainly reveals Himself to him.' When I heard these words of his, the impression grew on me that it was not mere poetry or imagination couched in fine figures of speech that he was expressing like other preachers of religion, but that he was speaking of something of which he had an immediate knowledge—of an attainment which had come to him by really renouncing everything for the sake of God and calling on Him with all his mind.

"Trying to harmonise these words of his with his behaviour towards me a little while previously, I remembered the examples of the monomaniacs mentioned by Abercrombie and other English philosophers, and came to the sure conclusion that he belonged to that class! Although I came to that conclusion, I could not forget the greatness of his wonderful renunciation for God. Speechless, I thought, 'Well, he may be mad, but it is indeed a rare soul alone in the world who could practise such renunciation. Yes, mad, but how pure! And what renunciation! He is truly worthy of respect, reverence and worship by the human heart.' Thinking thus, I bowed down at his feet, took leave of him, and returned to Calcutta that day."

Discipleship: Confrontation and Conversion

The story of Narendra's contact with Sri Ramakrishna during the ensuing four years is the story of his gradual conversion from a critical and cautious observer, who held him to be a 'blessed monomaniac', into an absolutely surrendered disciple, who was to declare him to be the *avatara-varishtha*-the greatest of incarnations—and be his chosen apostle to proclaim from a public platform in New York: "Today the name of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa is known all over India by its millions of people. Nay, the power of that man has spread beyond India, and if there has been a word of truth, a word of spirituality, that I have spoken anywhere in the world, I owe it to my Master; only the mistakes are mine." This conversion took place only after a bitter struggle between Naren's intellectual pride on the one hand, and on the other the personality of Sri Ramakrishna, which was a centre of spiritual power without an ego, and of love without a touch of selfishness.

The promised visit of Narendra to Dakshineswar for the second time came to pass about a month later. Describing the happenings on that day Naren said (as quoted in Swami Saradananda's *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, Vol. II, P. 842): "No sooner did he see me than he called me joyfully to him and made me sit at one end of his bedstead. I sat down but found him in a strange mood. He spoke something indistinctly to himself, looked steadfastly at me, and slowly began coming towards me. I thought another scene of lunacy was going to be enacted. Scarcely had I thought so when he came to me and placed his right foot on my body, and immediately I had a wonderful experience. I saw with my eyes open that all the things in the room together with the walls were rapidly whirling and receding into an unknown region, and my 'I-sense' together with the whole universe was, as it were, going to vanish in an all-devouring great Void. I was then overwhelmed with a terrible fear. I knew that the destruction of the 'I-sense' was death; so I thought that death was before me, very near at hand. Unable to control myself, I cried out loudly, saying, 'Ah! What is it you have done to me? I have my parents, you know!'

"Laughing loudly at my words, he touched my chest with his hands and said, 'Let it cease now. It need not be done all at once. It will come to pass in course of time." I was amazed to see how that extraordinary experience of mine vanished as quickly as it had come when he touched me in this manner and said those words. I came to the normal state and saw things inside and outside the room standing still as before."

All this took place in a trice, causing a revolution in Naren's mind. The critical and reflective youth that he was, he tried his best to understand how an apparently mad man could overwhelm his mind and refashion it like a ball of clay. Could it be mesmerism or hypnotism, of which he had read very much? It could not be, because he was proud of his own intelligence and strong will, and he had, moreover, gone there not as a submissive tool but as a hostile subject, having the firm conviction that the Master was a monomaniac. Besides, after the event, Narendra found the Master extremely normal in his behaviour, speaking to him lovingly, cracking jokes and treating him to refreshments, as if he were a long-standing friend of his. Habituated though he was to accept a proposition or a person only after thorough investigation, reasoning and argumentation, his intellectual ego however got blunted that day before this strange person. For, how could he sustain the original conclusion that he had made when he thus found him later to be a centre of power and of unselfish love, the like of which he had never come across before? So he left that day with the firm determination to investigate and understand the nature and power of that wonderful person.

Narendra's third visit to the Master took place just within a fortnight. He went that day with the firm resolution not to succumb to the influence of this enigmatic man, egoless and simple like a child but yet possessing a power that could easily subdue even a hostile will. That day the Master took him for a stroll in the neighbouring Jadu Mallik's garden. After walking for a while, the Master along with Narendra sat in the parlour of that vacant house. The Master then passed into an ecstasy and Naren sat there observing him. Suddenly the Master touched him in that ecstatic mood, and Narendra immediately lost all external consciousness in spite of all his resolution. When he came back to his normal consciousness he found the Master stroking his chest with a sweet smile on his face. Narendra had no memory of what had happened in the meanwhile, but in later days the Master told his disciples as follows about this incident: "When Narendra had lost his normal consciousness, I asked him that day many questions, such as who he was, where he came from, why he was born, how long he would be here in this world and so on. Entering into the depths of his being, he gave proper answers to all these questions. These answers of his confirmed what I had thought and seen and known about him in my visions. It is forbidden to reveal all these things. But I have known from all these that on the day when he will know who he is, he will no more remain in this world. He will immediately give up his body through Yoga, with the strong power of will. Narendra is a great soul perfect in meditation." (*Sri Ramakrishna The Great Master*, Vol. II, p. 845)

These experiences produced a profound change in Naren's attitude towards the Master, whom he had at first dubbed as a monomaniac. He now began to feel that Sri Ramakrishna could be relied upon as a spiritual director, a Guru. Till then, Naren would not accept the concept of the Guru which he looked upon as a slavish subjection to another fallible human being like oneself.

But this change in his attitude did not mean that he was ready to accept everything that the Master taught or practised. He had at that time a total abhorrence of image worship, and he considered non-dualism(Advaita) as puerile. According to him monotheism of the type preached by the Brahmos was the true religious ideology. Recognising the Master's greatness did not mean that he was ready to give up his reasoned out views on these matters unless direct experience or reasoning compelled him to do so.

Being a keen student of Western philosophy and sciences, he was well posted with the ideas of thinkers like Hume, Bentham, Darwin, Spencer, Kant, Fichte, Hegel, Schopenhauer etc. Some of these thinkers stood for blatant atheism, while many others were agnostics, holding that the spiritual principle generally known as God is unknown and unknowable to the human mind. Narendra's keen intelligence could easily perceive the short-comings in the attempt of these western thinkers to understand the ultimate reality, depending purely on the senses and the mind. For, what the mind perceives is only certain nerve stimulations in the brain and even that not directly but mediated by space and time. Besides this intellectual factor, there was his innate spiritual tendency and the influence of the Great Master that stood as inhibitions to his yielding to the Western materialistic and atheistic thought. But under the influence of these thought systems, he gave up the straight path of faith and devotion, as he was oppressed by doubts about the validity of the traditional belief in image worship, the need for a Guru, the conception of Deities, and even in the ultimate spiritual monism preached by the Vedanta. But in spite of this agnostic intellectual outlook, there were two qualifications which he instinctively accepted as absolutely necessary for a seeker of truth—the practice of continence and of meditation, and he stuck to these practices. So many attractive proposals of marriage, he refused to accept in spite of his father's pressure. As for meditation he adopted a new method of his own. Anthropomorphism, he thought, is unavoidable, whether you have for its object a God with form or without form. So, as Swami Saradananda says, "He gave up such meditations and prayed to the effect: 'O God! Make me fit to see Thy real nature.' He then removed all kinds of thought from his mind and keeping it still and motionless like the flame of a lamp in a windless space, tried to remain in that state. As a result of doing so for a short time, Narendra's mind, which had all along been restrained, used to merge in itself so deeply that even the consciousness of time and of his body disappeared now and then. He spent all nights that way on many occasions. As a result of this, one day, Narendra had an extraordinary vision. Later he described it to his friends in the course of a conversation. He said: 'There flowed in my mind a current of serene bliss when I kept it still, devoid of all objects. I felt for long, even after the end of the meditation, a sort of intoxication under its impulse. So, I did not feel inclined to leave the seat and get up immediately. One day when I was sitting in that condition at the end of meditation, I saw the extraordinary figure of a monk appear suddenly—from where I do not know—and stand before me at a little distance, filling the room with a Divine effulgence. He was in ochre cloth with a Kamandalu in his hand. His face bore such a calm and serene expression of inwardness born of indifference to all things that I was amazed and felt drawn towards him. He walked towards me with slow steps and eyes steadfastly fixed on me as if he wanted to say something. But I was seized with fear and could not keep quiet. I got up from my seat, opened the door and walked out of the room with rapid steps" (*Great Master* Vol. II, p. 916-7). But he returned to the room very soon after his mind was collected and courage restored, but the figure was not to be seen. He surmised that the form he saw must have been that of Lord Buddha.

Narendra's antipathy to Advaita was erased by the impact of the Master's spiritual power on him. Knowing, as he did, that Narendra was in future to be the interpreter of Advaitic thought to the modern world, Sri Ramakrishna cured him of these inhibitions by his spiritual power. Naren, being a follower of the Brahmo Samaj, was a strict follower of monotheism of a dualistic type. Sri Ramakrishna used to ask him to read aloud Advaitic texts like Ashtavakra Samhita, ostensibly for him to hear, but really to bring Narendra in rapport with those thoughts. One day after the Master had spoken something about Advaita, Narendra got up and went to the verandah, where was seated Pratapchandra Hazra, a very highly intellectual but hypocritical devotee. They began to talk sarcastically about Advaita, saying: "Is it ever possible that this water pot is God, this cup is God, whatever we see and all of us are God?" Hearing their talk and laughter, the Master came out, and asked what they were talking about. He then went into an ecstasy and touched Narendra. Afterwards, says Swami Saradananda, Narendra said as follows about the experience he had at the Master's touch. "There was a complete revolution in the state of my mind in a moment at the wonderful touch of the Master. I was aghast to see actually that there was nothing in the whole universe except God .... This inebriation did not at all cease that day. I returned home; it was all the same there. It seemed to me that all I saw was He ..... When I walked along the streets and saw a carriage coming along before me, I did not feel inclined, as at other times, to move away. My hands and feet always remained insensible at that time. While taking food I ceased to feel that I was eating. It seemed as if some one else was taking the meal . . . I could not escape that intense intoxicating mood and overwhelming condition for some time. When I came to the normal state, I thought it was the indication of the non-dual knowledge. So what is written in the scripture about it is by no means untrue. Since then I could not doubt the truth of non-duality." (*Great Master Vol.* II, P.879)

There were, however, two points on which Naren was in inherent agreement with the Master from the very start. They were the absolute need of renunciation and the indispensability of meditation for spiritual growth.

The unique relationship between the Master and the Disciple.

The years that followed constitute in Narendra's life a period of intellectual struggle with the Master and his gradual submission to him as a humble disciple, the submission being effected by the Master's unselfish love and divine power. At the very first meeting the Master had felt a very great attraction for Narendra, as he could identify him as the sage he had seen in his first vision, and therefore out of abounding love for him, he wanted to confer on him Nirvikalpa Samadhi, the highest realisation according to Vedanta. But he found Narendra was not yet prepared for it, as he fell into a fright when his ego was about to be obliterated, and cried for his parents. So the Master felt that there might be some mistake in his identification, and it was for clarifying this doubt that at his third meeting with Narendra, he put him into a state of mind in which he was enabled to dive into the depths of his being and answer the Master's questions about his identity. They assured the Master that his original vision about Narendra was true and that it would take some time for him to become fit for the highest spiritual realisation. The Master, however, felt assured that Narendra was to be his greatest help in the fulfilment of his mission, and began to evince towards him an intense affection and appreciation, the like of which the former got from no one else in the world. Like all other devotees, he at first began to visit Dakshineswar on Sundays, but in course of time these visits became more frequent, and he also began to stay with the Master for two or three days at a time, receiving spiritual stimulation from the Master and practising meditation under his direction. When, however, circumstances prevented him from visiting Dakshineswar, the Master would become very restless and make enquiries about him of all and sundry that came, and even go to Calcutta to meet him, sometimes creating very embarrassing situations. Once he went as an uninvited and unwanted visitor to a Brahmo prayer gathering for meeting Narendra there. The organisers on finding that some confusion was created by the Master's sudden entry into the hall, put out all lights to disperse the gathering. The Master was in a helpless condition, but Narendra, who had noticed his arrival came to his rescue. After helping him, Narendra chided him, saying that by his attachment for him, his fate would be like that of Jada Bharata, who became a deer because of his attachment to a deer. The Master, who was simple-minded like a child in his ordinary mood, took Narendra's words very seriously and got very much agitated in mind. As it was his custom to appeal to the Divine Mother whenever he was overcome with such doubts and difficulties, He did so on this occasion also, and his mind was set at rest only on getting the Mother's words of assurance: "You regard him as Narayana Himself. That is why you love him. The day you do not see Narayana in him, you will not even cast a glance at him."

The relationship between Narendra and the Great Master was characterised by an intimacy and informality born of unselfish love. There was none of the formality of the traditional relationship between disciple and teacher. With the insight he had into Naren's antecedents, the Master treated him as an equal and had no hesitation even to smoke from a common hookah. He rated him as a Nityasiddha and often said, "The fire of knowledge, ever ablaze in him, would reduce to ashes all blemishes relating to food. He daily cuts to pieces Maya's bondage with the sword of knowledge. Mahamaya therefore fails to bring him under her control." Often he used to praise him very highly comparing him with some of the luminaries of those days. He would say that if the famous Keshab Chandra

Sen was a lotus of ten petals, Narendra was a lotus of a thousand petals; if the former had an abundance of one power, Narendra had eighteen such; and if the former was like a candle, Narendra was the very Sun of Knowledge. Narendra often protested against such comparisons between a world-famous man and an unknown youth, but the Master would say he could not help doing so, as it was a fact revealed to him by the Mother. The Master did so only because he knew that Narendra was so high-minded that he would never get puffed up by such praise. But of all the disciples, Narendra was the only one who would question even the Master's views and realisation. He would often pooh-pooh the experiences of the Master saying, "Who can say that it is the Mother who is showing you all these things? They may as well turn out to be creations of your own deranged brain. If I had such experiences, I would certainly have taken them as whims of my own brain. Science and philosophy have proved beyond doubt that our senses often deceive us, especially if there is a desire in our mind to fancy a particular object as endowed with a particular quality. You are affectionate to me and want to see me great in all respects; this is why such visions appear to you." These and similar criticisms of his visions by Narendra as purely illusory, were ignored by the Master, as the prattle of an ignorant child while he was in the higher planes of consciousness, but when he was in his childlike mood, he would be upset by doubt, as he held Narendra to be absolutely truthful in mind and speech. He would then appeal to his Divine Mother and be freed from anxiety on hearing her words of assurance, "Why do you give ear to his words? In a short time he will accept all these things as true."

While the Master thus held Narendra in high esteem and loved him intensely, he did not omit to put his loyalty to a severe test. Generally, when Narendra came, the Master used to be overwhelmed with joy and to receive him with utmost cordiality and sometimes even go into ecstasy at his sight. But a sudden break came in this relationship. The Master began to assume an attitude of indiffernce to Narendra. One day Narendra came to the Master, bowed down and took his seat. But the Master took no notice of him and remained indifferent, speaking not even a word to him for the whole day. For more than a month the Master continued this indifferent attitude towards Narendra, but still Narendra paid his visits to the Master, without in any way being offended at his indifference. At last one day the Master asked him, "Well, I do not speak even a single word to you; still you are coming here. Why do you come?" Narendra replied, "Do I come here to hear what you speak? I love you, and I wish to see you. That is why I come." Highly pleased, the Master replied, "I was testing you. It is only a spiritual aspirant of your calibre that can put up with so much neglect and indifference. Any one else would have left me long ago and never come here again." (*Great Master*, Vol. II, p. 909).

Narendra in worldly difficulties

The frequency of Narendra's visits to the Master was interrupted by the sudden death of his father Viswanath Datta early in 1884 after Narendra had appeared for his B.A. Examination. Viswanath, who was very generous by nature, had spent more than he had earned, and consequently at his sudden death, the family found itself dropped from a state of affluence to one of indigence. What was worse, some of Narendra's close relatives, who had very much benefited by his father's generosity, even filed cases in order to oust him, his mother and brothers from their ancestral house.

Thus as the eldest member of the family, Narendra found himself to be the sole bread-winner of that very indigent household of five or six members. His efforts to find some job for the support of the family were fruitless. Many of his old friends, who considered it an honour to be associated with him in his prosperous days, now became very cold in their attitude towards him. There were, however, some who were following dubious ways of livelihood. They sympathised with him, came close to him, and advised him to follow their ways—ways which Narendra could never adopt even under the pressure of dire poverty. His association with such people was sufficient for gossipmongers to spread the scandal that Narendra, a follower of Sri Ramakrishna, had lost character. These stories reached the Master also, but he never believed them, and knowing, as he did, the inner worth of Narendra, told devotees that Narendra was incapable of descending to such levels. But as for Narendra himself, he assumed a defiant attitude at such critics by openly defending people adopting immoral ways for getting some relief from the sufferings of the world. What was more, he began to put on the appearance of an atheist, and by arguments pooh-poohed even faith in God. All this only confirmed the belief about his degeneration in the minds of his friends. But the one person who never lost faith in him and chided scandal-mongering devotees, was the Great Master.

Narendra's poverty and sufferings, however, continued. Many a day he had to go out without any food. One day, he was hunting for some job the whole day on an empty stomach. Drenched in rain, and meeting with no success, he was returning home at night with his legs tired and mind more weary than the body. To put it in his words: "The exhaustion was so great that, unable to proceed a single step further, I lay like a log of wood on the open verandah of a nearby house. I cannot say whether I lost consciousness altogether for sometime;

but I remember that thoughts and pictures of various colours, one after another, arose and vanished of themselves in my mind. I had no power to drive them away or to concentrate on one particular thought. I suddenly felt as if within my mind many screens were raised one after another by some providential power, and I saw in the innermost recesses of my heart the solutions of the problems which so long had baffled my intellect and distracted my mind—problem such as, 'Why are there malignant forces in the creation of a benign God, and where is the harmony between the stern justice and the infinite mercy of God?' I was beside myself with joy. Afterwards when I resumed my walk home, I found there was not an iota of fatigue in my body and that my mind was filled with infinite strength and peace. The day was then about to break."

After these experiences, Narendra resolved to renounce the world, as he felt strongly that maintaining a family was not the calling to which he was born. But a day or two before he was to carry out this resolve, he heard that the Master was coming on a visit to a neighbouring devotee's house.

So Naren resolved to meet his Guru and take his leave for good. But when he met him, the Master compelled him to go with him to Dakshineswar. On being seated in his room at Dakshineswar, the Master held him by his hand in a very emotional mood and passed into an ecstasy. Then he recited a verse conveying his fear of losing Naren, with tears flowing from his eyes. On thus knowing that the Master had already understood his intention, Narendra also became highly emotional and began to shed tears. Afterwards the Master called him to his side and said: "Know that you have come to this world for the Mother's work; you can never live a worldly life. But remain in your family as long as I am alive."

Reconciled to the worship of the Divine Mother in the image

So Narendra returned home that day. But soon the problems of the family became overwhelming. He now remembered that God would grant the Master's prayers, and so went to Dakshineswar and persistently requested the Master to pray on his behalf for the improvement of his worldly condition. To quote Swami Saradananda on what Narendra said about that day's happenings: "The Master said to me affectionately, 'My child I cannot say such words, you know. Why don't you yourself pray? You don't accept the Mother. That is why you suffer so much.' I replied, 'I have no knowledge of the Mother. Please pray to the Mother yourself for my sake. Pray you must. I will not leave you unless you do so.' The Master said with affection, 'I prayed to the Mother many times indeed to remove your sufferings. But as you do not accept the Mother, She does not grant the prayer. Well, today is Tuesday, a day specially sacred to the Mother. The Mother will, I say, grant you whatever you ask for. Go to the temple tonight, and bowing down to Her, pray for a boon. My affectionate Mother is the power of Brahman. She is Pure Consciousness embodied. She has given birth to the universe by Her will. What is it that She cannot do, if She wills?'

"A firm faith arose in my mind that all the sufferings would certainly come to an end as soon as I prayed to the Mother inasmuch as the Master had said so. I waited for the night in great expectancy. The night arrived at last. Three hours of the night had elapsed when the Master asked me to go to the holy temple. As I was going, a sort of powerful inebriation possessed me. I was reeling. A firm conviction gripped me that I would actually see the Mother and hear Her words. I forgot all other things, completely merged in that thought alone. Coming into the temple, I saw the Mother was actually Pure Consciousness, was actually living, and was really the fountainhead of infinite love and beauty. My heart swelled with loving devotion, and beside myself with bliss, I made repeated salutations to Her, praying, 'Mother, grant me discrimination, grant me detachment, grant me divine knowledge and devotion; ordain that I may always have an unobstructed vision of Thee.' My heart was flooded with peace. The whole universe completely disappeared and the Mother alone remained filling my heart."

When Narendra returned to the Master after his failure to pray to the Mother, the Master sent him a second and a third time to control his feelings and pray for the improvement of his worldly conditions.

But everytime the same happened as at first. Before the Mother, Narendra got inebriated and could pray only for devotion and discrimination and knowledge. The Master now pointed out to Narendra the lesson of these experiences—namely, that he was born not to have worldly happiness but for fulfilling a divine purpose for the good of the whole world. He, however, said in reply to Narendra's persistent request for the welfare of his family, that it would never be in want of food and clothing.

This was a turning point in Narendra's life. The three important obstacles that stood in his way of fully accepting the Vedantic spiritual heritage were one after another removed. The experience of the Master's wonderful spiritual power and unselfish love made him accept the Guru ideal. The experience of the insubstantiality of the external world by an act of the Master's will removed his inhibition against the Advaitic thought. And now worldly woes combined with the Master's grace helped him to accept the Divine Mother or the personal aspect of the Divine and the value of worship of Him in divine images. Sufferings in the world mellowed not only the intellectual pride of Narendra, but also opened his mind to the sufferings in the world at large and thus prepared the ground for the future make-up of Swami Vivekananda, the great lover of humanity.

The sweet memory of the days Narendra spent with the Master filled his mind with infinite joy throughout his life. He used to say "It is difficult to explain to others how blissfully I spent my days with the Master. It is simply astonishing to think how, through play, merriment and other ordinary daily activities, he gave us the most exalted spiritual education and moulded our lives without our knowledge." This happy period of Narendra's association with the Master extended to about five years, of which during the first four years he visited him at Dakshineswar, and in the last year he served him at Cossipore.

Naren at the Master's sick bed

It was in the middle of 1885 that Sri Ramakrishna showed signs of cancer in the throat and was removed for treatment first to Shyampukur and then to a garden-house at Cossipore. The intimate devotees of the

Master now took upon themselves the duty of attending to the medical treatment of their Master. The householder devotees paid the expenses while the young disciples, who later on became Sannyasins, undertook the duty of nursing the Master, staying at Cossipore. Narendra was their leader. Most of these young men were studying in colleges and their guardians were sore at heart to see them neglect their studies and stay away from the educational institutions. So Narendra had to persuade them to stay on by making them understand that their duty to their Great Master was more important than anything else, and that association with such a great and illumined soul they would never get afterwards. So, attracted by their love of the Master and guided by Narendra's leadership, this small band of fifteen young men became the nucleus of the later monastic Order of Ramakrishna. Till now these young men were all only occasional visitors to Dakshineswar and casual acquaintances of one another. The Master's illness was thus the occasion for them to become a strongly knit community, serving him, and practising spiritual disciplines under his direction.

All of them had great spiritual realisations but Narendra's progress was the most remarkable. With the three inhibitions that stood in the way of his development, namely, the non-acceptance of the Guru ideal, the contempt for the truth of non-duality and his disregard for the universal Mother, his inherent spiritual aspiration burst forth into a mighty flame. He spent nights wrapt in meditation so deep that even if a thick blanket of mosquitoes covered his body, he could not be roused from his absorption in the Spirit. It was on one those days that the Master asked him what his ideal in life was. He replied that it was to remain absorbed in Samadhi all the time, with only short intervals of relative consciousness to take some food for the maintenance of the body. The Master then told him that Samadhi was too small an ideal for him. He was to be like a wide-spreading tree that gave protection to countless numbers of weary travellers, meaning that he had come to the world not for any end of his own, but for the service of humanity.

None the less the Master was gracious enough to bless him with Nirvikalpa Samadhi, which is considered the highest non-dualistic experience in which the 'I-consciousness'. becomes merged in, and identified with, the Universal Consciousness. It was the state of consciousness which the Master wanted to confer on Narendra at his very first meeting with him, but it was found that he was not yet prepared for it then. Afterwards when his mind was more mature, Narendra had prayed many a time to the Master for this experience. At last one evening, while he was meditating in a room in Cossipore garden-house, he felt a brilliant light at the back of his head. It became bigger and bigger and finally seemed to burst. His mind was merged in it, without the least trace of external and bodily consciousness. Gopal Senior, who was also meditating in that room, heard Naren crying out 'O Gopal-da where is my body?' His body was lying rigid and ice-cold as in death. Afraid that he was dying, Gopal-Senior reported the matter to the Master, who was sitting in a state of intense calmness with a serious look in his countenance. On hearing what had happened, the Master, who had intuitively understood the whole position, said, "Let him stay in that state for a while. He has been teasing me long enough for it." At about 9 p.m. he began to become conscious little by little. When he became fully conscious of his body and the external world, his heart was over-flowing with bliss. Then he presented himself before the Master, who looked at him intently and said, "Now, then, the Mother has shown you everything. Just as a treasure is locked up in a box, so will this realisation you have had just now be locked up, and the key shall remain with me. You have work to do. When you have finished Mother's work, the treasure box will be unlocked again; and you will know everything then as you did just now."

The Master's ascension and formation of the Monastic Brotherhood

During the few days more that the Master lived,he did several things for the continuance of the work of spiritual ministration that he had started. He gave ochre clothes to the young men attending on him and asked them to take holy alms (Bhiksha), thus symbolising their constitution into a monastic community. He further entrusted them to

Narendra's care, commanding him to instruct these young men and lead them. Narendra hesitated to do this. The Master one day called Narendra to his side. He looked steadfastly at him and entered into Samadhi. Narendra now felt that a subtle force was entering into him and he lost external consciousness. When he came to himself the Master said to him feelingly: "O Naren, today I have given you my all and have become a Fakir, a penniless beggar. By the force of the power transmitted by me, great things will be done by you. Only after that will you go where you came from. Further the Master used to seat him by his side and speak to him in privacy for a considerable length of time, most probably instructing him on spiritual matters, and how to keep together and guide the small Brotherhood that was formed by his sickbed.

Towards the end, a day or two before the Master's passing, a curious idea entered Narendra's mind. The Master had several times told them that he was an Incarnation of the Divine. Narendra now thought within himself that he would be convinced of it, only if the Master were to declare this in his present state of utter physical prostration. No sooner did this idea pass through Naren's mind than the Master, who could hardly speak, drew up all his energy and spoke in clear voice: "O Naren! Are you not yet convinced? He who was Rama, He who was Krishna, He Himself is now Ramakrishna in this body—but not in your Vedantic sense." It means that what is averred is not what is conveyed by the Vedantic teaching that the Jiva is Brahman Himself, but that the Power which creates, preserves and dissolves the universe is also the Redeeming Power which appears from time to time in human form for the Salvation of man, and that He (Ramakrishna) is identical with that Power.

Sri Ramakrishna passed away on the 16th of August 1886. Within a few, days, the Cossipore establishment was disbanded. Narendra, even in those early days, wanted to acquire a piece of land on the bank of the Ganges to install the sacred relics of the Master. To his great disappointment he could not succeed in it then. It had to await his return from his successful mission in the West to establish a temple for the Master's relics, with a monastery attached to it at Belur. Gradually all the young monastics with Naren as their director gathered together, with an old dilapidated building at Baranagore as the Math for their residence. It was only by Narendra's persistent exhortation that many of these young men got over the pull of their kith and kin and came to stay in the monastery. The life in the monastery was unbelievably austere. Food and clothing were very scanty, but the power of their aspiration and their burning spirit of renunciation compensated for it. There was nothing like social and humanitatian works of service to engage the monastic Order in its early days. The time of the monastic brothers was therefore completely taken up with meditation, devotional practices, Bhajan and study of the scriptures. Sri Ramakrishna had already given them ochre clothes and made them Sannyasins; but to confirm their entering into the Sannyasin Order with traditional rites, they performed the Viraja Homa and adopted new names. Narendra is supposed to have adopted the name of Vividishananda then, but in order to avoid being identified by his brother disciples during the days of his wandering as a Parivrajaka, he seemed to have called himself sometimes Vividishananda and sometimes Satchidananda. It was on the eve of his departure to the West that he assumed the name of Vivekananda permanently.

After some months of a community life at the Math, the young men felt the traditional urge of the Indian monks to lead a wandering life, visiting the holy places and performing austerities in solitary spots. So one after another they left the Math for shorter or longer periods as Parivrajakas (wanderers), but the continuity of the Math and the service of the Master were kept up by Sasi (Swami Ramakrishnananda), who never left the Master's relics enshrined at the Baranagore Math. Narendra, or Swami Vivekananda as we shall call him hereafter, also felt this urge, and left Calcutta in 1888 as a wandering monk. For some time he travelled in the company of one or another of his fellow-disciples and occasionally returned to the Math. But from 1890 he never came to the Math till his return in 1897 after his successful mission in the West. For a few months of this period he travelled with Swami Akhandananda on Himalayan pilgrimages, and then left him at Meerut and travelled alone, avoiding contact with his fellow-disciples as far as possible. His idea seems to have been to avoid all ties of personal affection. This phase of his life continued till the beginning of 1893 when he returned to Madras from Kanyakumari and Rameswaram, completing his pilgrimage from the Himalayas to the southernmost end of India.

Life as a wandering ascetic

In a short history of the Swami's life like this, it is not possible to give a full account of these travels. We shall therefore give only a few striking events from his experiences. At Gazipore, not far from Allahabad, he met the saintly ascetic Pavahari Baba who impressed him very much. Besides being learned, the Baba was very ascetic in life, subsisting on practically no food, so that people called him 'the father who subsists on air'. He was a master of Hatha Yoga and Raja Yoga. Swamiji was at that time suffering from various ailments, and so he thought he would learn Hathayoga from the Baba, so that he might free his body from diseases. A day was fixed for initiation, but, to put it in his own words, "On the eve of the day on which I was to take initiation, I was lying on a cot thinking; and just then I saw the form of Sri Ramakrishna standing on my right, looking steadfastly at me, as if very much grieved. I had dedicated my life to him, and at the thought that I was taking another Guru, I felt much ashamed and kept looking at him. Thus perhaps two or three hours passed, but no words escaped my mouth. Then he disappeared all on a sudden." Being upset in mind, the Swami did not take the initiation that day. A day or two later, again he thought of initiation, but the experience of the previous night repeated itself. Thus he had this vision of Sri Ramakrishna on successive days whenever the thought of taking initiation from Pavahari Baba came to his mind. So he gave up the idea completely. But he had very great respect for the Baba, which is reflected in one full essay written by him later, on getting news of the Baba's passing away.

Another noteworthy incident of his wandering days took place at Alwar. During these wanderings the Swami mixed with all strata of society, from the princes to the peasants. Whenever he reached a place, before long he came to the notice of important people of the place and received their hospitality. Thus at Alwar he came to be known to the Dewan of the State, who introduced the Swami to the Maharajah. The prince was very much anglicised in his views and manners, and held many of the Hindu religious practices in contempt. Once the Maharajah raised the topic of image worship with the Swami and spoke slightingly about the practice. The Swami kept silent for some time, and then asked the Dewan, pointing to an oil painting of the Maharajah on the wall of the Durbar hall, "Whose picture is it?" On receiving the reply that it was the Maharajah's, he asked the Dewan to take it down and spit on it. Struck with surpise and awe, the Dewan exclaimed how he could do such an act insulting to the Maharajah. The Swami thereupon asked him how it would be an insult to the Maharajah, since the picture was only some canvas and paint. Then turning to the Maharajah he pointed out that just as his picture, though it was not himself, was by association of ideas so intimately identical with him, so was a divine image a revealer of the Deity to a believing devotee, and it is that Deity he worships and not mere mud or stone. The very vivid and dramatic way in which the Swami drove home the point into the Maharajah's mind made it a turning point in the religious views of the Prince.

Still another striking incident took place while the Swami was staying with the Maharajah of Khetri, who had become a great admirer and disciple of his. One evening a nautch-girl was holding a musical concert for the entertainment of the Maharajah. The Swami who was lodged in a nearby camp was invited by the Maharajah to hear the music, but he sent word that being a Sannyasin, he would not like to hear a nautch-girl sing. This wounded the feelings of that girl, and she, in reply to the Swami, as it were, sang a song of Surdas which ran as follows :

O Lord, look not upon my evil qualities!
Thou art, O Lord, called the Same-sighted.
One piece of iron is in the image in the temple,
And another, the knife in the hand of the butcher;

But when they touch the philosopher's stone
Both alike turn into gold.
So Lord, look not upon my evil qualities.

In the stillness of the evening the voice of the deeply hurt girl reached the ears of the Swami, and caused a revolution of feelings in his mind, opening his eyes to a great truth which he was preaching, but which he seemed to have forgotten. This is reminiscent of the story in Sri Sankaracharya's life, of a Chandala with a pack of dogs teaching Sankara a lesson on the unaffectedness of the all-pervading Brahman.

Another striking incident took place when the Swami was travelling in Tari Ghat, now in Uttar Pradesh. On a blazing day he was travelling in a third class compartment with a ticket which some one had provided him with. He got down at Tari Ghat station, and as he was not allowed by the porter to sit in the station yard, he sat outside the shed on the ground leaning against a pillar of the shed. Just opposite to him within the shed was sitting a Bania (a trader) on a cotton seat. He had been travelling in the same compartment with the

Swami the previous night, and knew that the Swami had had nothing to eat for the whole day, and could not get even a glass of water to quench his thirst, as he had no money. The Bania, who had a poor opinion of Sannyasins, now began to taunt the Swami, while he himself was eating Poories and drinking cool water, saying: "My good man, look at me: how I am eating and drinking, while you are sitting all the while starving and thirsty. Why don't you earn money, as I do, and have these good things?" While this discourse was going on, there appeared on the scene a local man with a bundle and a pot of water. Spreading a seat and arranging water in a cup and some Poories on a leaf plate, he invited the Swami in all humility to partake of the fare. The Swami was very much puzzled and told the man that he must have some other person in mind and had mistaken him to be that one. "No, no," said the man, "I am commanded by Sri Ramji to bring these to you. I was sleeping after my lunch when I had a dream in which Ramji appeared to me and pointing to you, asked me to bring you food and drink. Considering it to be a dream only, I turned aside and again slept. Again

Ramji appeared, actually pushed me and said the same as before. So I have brought all these. You are really the person whom Ramji showed me in dream. Now, Babaji, come and have your meal." The jeering Bania who witnessed all this, begged the Swami to pardon him for his impudent behaviour and took the dust of his feet.

The Swami's life as a wandering monk is replete with many such incidents, which give both instruction and inspiration to a close student. This was the period during which the great spiritual aspirant of Dakshineswar, whose one ideal was to be immersed always in Samadhi, gradually grew into that mighty tree, as his Master wanted, fit to give shelter to numerous wayfarers on the desert paths of life—into the great Swami Vivekananda, the passionate lover of India and the friend of the poor and the down-trodden, Swami Vivekananda, the preacher of practical Vedanta and the doctrine of Sarvamukti. It was the period during which he mixed intimately with all classes of India, the princes and the peasants, the Pandits and the ignorant, and got a first hand knowledge of the lives and cultures of the various types of people inhabiting this vast subcontinent from the Himalayas down to Cape Comorin. It was the experience of the period that made the sufferings of millions pulsate through his veins, and on the eve of his departure to the West, made him declare, like a Buddha reborn, to Swami Turiyananda, in a mood of extreme pathos, "Haribhai, I am still unable to understand anything of your so-called religion. But my heart has expanded very much, and I have begun to feel. Believe me, I feel intensely indeed." It is these wanderings all over India, communing with its people and the centres of its culture, that helped Narendra, the ascetic Sannyasin and the ardent aspirant, to turn into Swami Vivekananda, the patriot, the humanist, and the world-wide preacher of Vedanta.

Decision to attend the Parliament of Religions

He first heard of the forth-coming Parliament of Religions at Chicago, which was to project him from an unknown wandering Sannyasin into a preacher of world-wide reputation, while he was moving about in Kathiawar in the last months of 1891.

The idea of attending it must have first dawned in his mind soon after, because, when he was at Khandwa in January 1892, we find him telling his host Haridas Babu, referring to the Parliament, "If some one can help me with the passage money, all will be well, and I shall go." As days passed, this idea became stronger and stronger in his mind. When he was in Mysore, he spoke about his intention in this respect to the Maharajah, who promised help in the matter and even offered ten thousand rupees, which the Swami then refused to accept. From Mysore he went via Kerala to Kanyakumari and from there via Madurai to Rameswaram which was the terminus of the pilgrimage of India he had undertaken. At Kanyakumari the Swami meditated for three days on the Rock, where his great memorial stands today, and in this meditation he seems to have got a clearer idea of the mission that was before him to fulfil. After he reached Madras from Rameswaram, he was besieged by the best intellectuals of this enlightened city, and several of them requested him to attend the Parliament. They even raised funds for his trip to Chicago. But the Swami was not yet finally decided and he asked the collected amount to be distributed among the poor. The doubt was still lurking in his mind that personal ambition might be behind all these ideas of his, and that unless he got some indication that it was otherwise from the Master himself, he should not undertake such a mission. This he now got through a symbolic dream in which he saw his Master, Sri Ramakrishna walking from the sea-shore into the ocean, beckoning him to follow. Before taking a final decision, he wrote to Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, informing her of the proposal to go to the West, and seeking her blessing in the matter. The Mother replied giving her permission and blessing. On receiving the Mother's letter, the Swami danced and wept with joy, and when he appeared that day for his daily discourse to his disciples and devotees, the first thing he said was, "Yes, now to the West, the West! Now I am ready. Let us go to work in right earnest. The Mother herself has spoken!"

For the Swami's journey, the Madras disciples raised Rs. 4,000 from the people. The donations from the Maharajas of

Mysore and the Raja of Ramnad were not as substantial as expected, probably the princes were afraid of the British Political Agents. When all arrangements for his starting from Madras were being made by his disciples, a pressing message through a personal envoy came to the Swami from the Maharajah of Khetri, an ardent disciple of his, to visit his State to bless his new-born son. The Maharajah's envoy offered to make all arrangements for the Swami to sail from Bombay on the scheduled date of 31st of May 1893, and took him to Khetri. After three week's stay at Khetri the Swami set sail via Japan on the 31st May 1893, being provided with a first class ticket, a handsome purse and ample clothings by the Khetri Maharaja himself. Even before he sailed to attend the Parliament of Religions, he had already a premonition of the success that was going to attend on him. For, he made the following remark to Swami Turiyananda whom he happened to meet a few weeks previous to his sailing. "Haribhai," he said, "I am going to America. Whatever you hear of as happening there (meaning preparation for the Parliament of Religions) is all for this. (striking his own chest) For this (me) alone everything is being arranged!" It was on the eve of his leaving for the West that the Swami at the request of the Khetri Maharaja finally assumed the name of Vivekananda, in place of Satchidananda by which he was often known till then.

The day of struggle in pre-Parliament days

The Swami reached America towards the end of July 31, 1893, sailing via Ceylon, China and Japan. Reaching Chicago, he was taken aback to learn from the Information Bureau that the Parliament would be held only in September and that to be admitted as a delegate one was required to show credentials issued by a recognised religious organisation. He had no such letters of introduction to prove his being a representative of Hinduism, nor had he sufficient money to carry on for two months in that expensive country. So the early days of his sojourn in America were only an extension of his Parivrajaka days, cast as it was in uncertainty, with kind Providence alone as his support. The man of destiny that he was, he overcame all the apparently formidable obstacles in Providential ways. On his way to Boston a well-to-do lady became acquainted with him and she invited him to stay at her house. She also introduced him to Mr. J. H. Wright, the Professor of Greek in the Harvard University. Prof. Wright was very much impressed by the Swami in the course of a long conversation he had with him. When the Swami expressed his difficulty in attending the Parliament of Religions for lack of credentials, the Professor replied, "To ask you, Swami, for your credentials is like asking the sun to state his right to shine." He immediately gave him a letter of introduction to Dr. Barrows, the Chairman of the Committee for admitting delegates, and also provided him with a ticket to Chicago. Reaching Chicago the Swami found that he had lost the address of the office of the Parliament, and being a coloured man, no one whom he accosted on the way, showed any inclination to help him. He walked along the road until he was quite weary and the approach of night was near at hand. He found a big empty box at a Railway yard, which he improvised as his shelter for that cold night in the right royal fashion of a Parivrajaka Sannyasin. This perhaps may be called the last day of his Parivrajaka life; for the day after the next, he was destined to shine on the world's platform as the famous Swami Vivekananda.

In the morning he got up and, walking a little, found himself in a fashionable quarter of the city. Trudging along the road, he begged for food and shelter at several houses, only to be rudely rebuffed. At last, weary and hungry, he sat on the roadside, resigning himself to the Divine will. Just then happened an event which was nothing short of a miracle, pre-planned by a kind Providence. From a fashionable house just opposite to where the Swami was sitting, a tall regal-looking lady came out, approached him, and courteously enquired whether he was an Oriental delegate to the Parliament of Religions. On the Swami's answering in the affirmative, she offered to take him to the office of the Parliament, but before that she wanted him to visit her home for breakfast. The lady was Mrs. George W. Hale. This was the beginning of the Swami's friendship with the family of the Hales, and all through his sojourn in America, their home was the centre from which he moved about in the different parts of the United States, and the correspondence he had all through the rest of his life with the members of that family provides us with much valuable biographical details, besides delightful reading material. Mrs. Hale took the Swami to the office of the Parliament where he presented his credentials and was accepted as a delegate. He was then accommodated with other Oriental delegates.

The Parliament of Religions and after

The Parliament of Religions which was held from the 11th to the 27th of September 1893 in the Hall of Columbus, was a part of the World's Columbian Exposition in the city of Chicago. A Parliament of Religions was given a place in it because of the awareness of the importance of religion among the various other disciplines like education, art, sciences etc., in making human life meaningful. It is also remarkable that at a time when the vast majority of people in the West still believed that Christianity was the only true religion, a Convention of this type was held, where delegates representing Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism,Judaism,Confucianism,Shintoism, Islam, Mazdaism etc. sat side by side with Cardinals and Bishops of the Catholic and Protestant Churches. It signified the growing spirit of ecumenism in the Western world, overcoming the long-standing bigoted fundamentalism of the Christian Churches, which considered truth, morality and holiness to be a monopoly of Christianity. There might have been the subtle objective of projecting the image of Christianity through the medium of that international assemblage, but in that respect the result was the opposite, thanks to the presence of Swami Vivekananda on the occasion.

Swami Vivekananda made his debut on the world stage when he opened his first short speech at the Parliament with that endearing form of address: "Sisters and brothers of America." The utterance of these five words worked like a magic spell on that huge audience of nearly six thousand who gave a standing ovation to the Swami for several minutes, as if heralding the advent of a new prophet. In his address at the Parliament of Religions he thanked the people of America in the name of "the most ancient Order of monks in the world", in the name of "the most ancient of religions" and in the name of "the millions and millions of Hindu people of all classes and sects." He declared, after describing the all-inclusive comprehensiveness of Hinduism: "From the high flight of Vedanta philosophy, of which the latest discoveries of science seem like echoes, to the low ideas of idolatry with its multifarious mythology, the agnosticism of the Buddhists and the atheism of the Jains, each and all have a place in the Hindu's religion." In fact what he did in the Chicago Address was to proclaim the Charter of Neo-Hinduism, formulating the common principles for which the varying sects of this religious group stood.

For the rest of the sessions the Swami became the favourite speaker of the assembly, and when the audience was bored by the tedious eloquence of the other speakers and became restive, the President found that the best means to get them into order was to announce that Vivekananda would be the next speaker. The Press began to lionise him as an 'Orator by divine right', and prominent persons, men and women, jostled to shake hands with him and vied with one another to invite him to their homes. Swami Vivekananda thus created history with five words, and from the obscurity of a Parivrajaka he became the man of the hour in a trice, on the 11th of September 1893.

From the time of the Parliament of Religions in September 1893 till the latter part of August 1895 when he set sail to England, the Swami had hectic work, giving lectures on India and the Vedanta in different parts of America. They were mostly public lectures, or series of lectures under the auspices of learned societies like Brooklyn Ethical Society, or parlour talks in the houses of friends, or classes for groups of earnest disciples like what took place in Thousand Island Park. His activities extended to most of the important American cities and to centres of learning like the Harvard University. He had occasion to exchange ideas with learned American savants like Prof. William James, Prof. Wright and the electrician Nicolas Tesla. He worked with tremendous energy, sometimes holding two or three talks a day. Many leading papers published accounts of him and reports of his lectures. Thus he became a widely known public figure, and his lectures began to attract large crowds. As a result of his work, many misconceptions about India in the minds of Americans were removed, and the liberal views of Vedanta began to exert a silent influence on the thought current of the country. He was even offered the chair in Oriental Philosophy at Harvard and the chair in Sanskrit at the Columbia University. Several earnest aspirants, men and women, gathered round him as a close circle of students and friends. Among them may be mentioned the members of the Hale family, Mr & Mrs. Leggett, Miss MacLeod, Mrs. Ole Bull, Dr. Allan Day, Miss S.E. Waldo, Prof. Wright, Dr. Street and many others. Several important series of his lectures, those now included in the *Bhakti Yoga*, *Karma Yoga* and *Raja Yoga* were delivered during this period, and they came out in book form and ran to several editions.

Persecution by jealous fanatics

While the Swami's mission in America

was a great success, and he received a warm reception from large numbers of people, life for him in that country was not a bed of roses. Though he was free from the financial worries and uncertain conditions of life of his early days in America, he was now faced with a different kind of harassment after his success. Christian missionaries now found that by his exposition of Hinduism many Americans began to doubt the propriety of sending these messengers of Christ to a country that could produce a Vivekananda. Those Christian zealots therefore felt that the sources of their funds might dry up if things went on in that way. They found excellent allies in the Theosophists and the Brahmo leader Pratapchandra Mazumdar, who had become extremely jealous of the Swami and felt an identity of interest with the Christian Missionaries in carrying on a campaign of vilification against him. The tactics they adopted was to publicise that the Swami was not a true Sannyasin but a mere upstart who did not represent any section of the Hindus. What was still worse, they started a campaign of character assassination, depicting him as a sexual pervert and warning American householders against entertaining him. As regards the attack on his character, his friends in America knew what an utter lie it was, and they ably defended him whenever occasion arose. The Swami himself made light of such propaganda, but we find from his letters to the Madras disciples that he was a little worried that his friends in India delayed to prove his representative character by holding public meetings and sending reports of the proceedings. Communication with India was time-consuming and public opinion too was slow to take shape in those days. But after a time such meetings were held in some of the metropolises of India under the presidency of distinguished men and the news of the Swami's success percolated all the levels of Indian society. Newspaper cuttings of the proceedings of such meetings were sent to America and some of these were published in American papers for dispelling the effect of the false propaganda of the missionaries.

Mission to England

After having established a permanent centre of Vedanta work in New York with

Mr. F.H. Leggett as the President, the Swami next turned his attention to England from where there were pressing calls for his presence. He sailed from New York with Mr. Legget to London on the 17th of August 1895, and after a short halt at Paris, reached London on 10th September. He stayed at first as the guest of Miss Henrietta Muller, and later, of Mr. E.T. Sturdy. After about four months of work in England, he again went to America, only to return to London in April 1896. After three or four months of strenuous work, he went for a tour of the Continent with the Seviers at the earnest persuasion of his friends, to seek relaxation after the very hard work of the foregoing months. After the tour, he came back to London on the 17th September 1896, and continued his work in London till December. After that he sailed back to India on the 16th via the European Continent with a batch of his Western disciples and friends like Mr. & Mrs. Sevier and Mr. Goodwin.

The course of lectures and discourses that the Swami conducted in London drew large crowds of English men and women to his teachings. Men and women who were high-ranking in society, including leading ecclesiastics and aristocrats met him without any inhibitions. Leading papers gave him a good coverage, and unlike his experience in America, no body of missionaries in England raised any slanderous campaign against him. This welcome and receptiveness which he met with in England was an eye-opener to him. As he himself said later, no one landed on the shore of England with so much prejudice against the British as he, but experience led him to admire their character—conservative yet practical, heroic in mould yet hiding a very soft current of feeling underneath.

During his stay in England and the Continent, he had meetings, with two of the most distinguished Indologists of those days, Prof. Max Muller, and Prof. Paul Deussen. Prof. Max Muller invited him to his home at Oxford and the Swami had a wide exchange of thought with him. Max Muller had already written his well-known article, *A Real Mahatma* on Sri Ramakrishna in the *Nineteenth Century*. It is remarkable that the Great Master had already attracted the attention of the Professor and that he found a true representative of the Vedanta in him. He was anxious to get more information on the subject from Swamiji, and it was with the information thus supplied, that he produced his book, *Ramakrishna: his life and sayings*. It was probably the first comprehensive book on the Master to appear in the English language, and coming as it did from a noted Orientalist of the time, it greatly helped in promoting the Vedantic teachings of Swamiji in those early days.

Deussen, the noted Indologist and Vedantic scholar of Germany, invited the Swami to Kiel, while the latter was touring the European Continent. The Swami had exchange of thought with him at Kiel, and also when Deussen joined him in his travels at Hamburg, Amsterdam and London. A remarkable incident, which should have been an eye-opener to the scholar Deussen took place while he was conversing with the Swami in his study. The Swami was going through a poetical work from the Professor's shelf, when the latter attempted to talk with him. But there was no response from the Swami. This was brought to the notice of the Swami afterwards, and the Swami apologised, saying that he was absorbed in reading and did not hear his being addressed. The explanation was not quite convincing to the Professor until, sometime after, the Swami quoted verse after verse from that book in the course of the conversation. This surprised the Professor very much. The Swami explained to him that by the practice of Yogic concentration, the mind can get so absorbed in a subject that one will be unaware even if a piece of live charcoal were placed on one.

Thus from 1893 to 1896 the Swami spent himself in laying the firm foundations of Vedanta in America and England. In both the countries he was able to establish Vedanta centres—at New York in America, and at London in England, and supply for each a minister from his fellow disciples in India. When Swamiji left the West, Swami Saradananda was given charge of the Vedanta work in America, and Swami Abhedananda, of the work in London. England contributed to him very valuable friends and disciples who were to play a very important part in his work in India. These were Captain and Mrs. Sevier, Miss Margaret Noble later known as Sister Nivedita, Miss Henrietta Muller, and Mr. Goodwin. All of them followed the Swami to India and gave him substantial help in organising his Indian work. Of the work of service of the last one, special mention has to be made here. To him the world owes a great debt of gratitude. It was he, Mr. Goodwin, who took down in shorthand most of the great lectures of the Swami in the West and in India, and if we can today commune with the spirit of the Swami through his scriptural utterances published as his *Complete Works*, much of the credit goes to this young Englishman.

In his preaching and teaching in the West, the Swami, while expressing admiration for the progressive spirit of the West, never allowed himself to be carried away by it. He uncompromisingly stood for the cultural dignity of India and her incomparable spiritual excellence, and gave expression to it in bold and powerful words. A quotation from one of his masterly oratorical pieces, *My Master*, is illustrative of this point. He says therein: "But before going into the life of this man (Sri Ramakrishna), I will try to present before you the secret of India, what India means. If those whose eyes have been blinded by the glamour of material things, whose whole dedication of life is to eating and drinking and enjoying, whose ideal of possession is lands and gold, whose ideal of pleasure is that of the senses, whose God is money, and whose goal is a life of ease and comfort in this world and death after that, whose minds never look forward, and who rarely think of anything higher than the sense objects in the midst of which they live;—if such as these go to India, what do they see? Poverty, squalor, superstition, darkness, hideousness everywhere. Why? Because in their minds enlightenment means dress, education, social politeness. Whereas, Occidental nations have used every effort to improve their material position, India has done differently. There, live the only men in the world, who, in the whole history of humanity, never went beyond their frontiers to conquer any one, who never coveted that which belonged to any one else, whose only fault was that their lands were so fertile, and they accumulated wealth by the hard labour of their hands, and so tempted other nations to come and despoil them. They are content to be despoiled, and to be called barbarians, and in return, they want to send to this world visions of the Supreme, to lay bare for the world the secrets of human nature, to rend the veil that conceals the real man, because they know the dream, because they know that behind this materialism lives the real divine nature of man which no sin can tarnish, no crime can spoil, no lust can taint; which fire cannot burn, nor water wet, which heat cannot dry, nor death kill; and to them this true nature of man is as real as is any material object to the senses of an occidental. Just as you are brave to jump at the mouth of a cannon with a hurrah; just as you are brave in the name of patriotism, to stand up and give up your lives for your country, so are they brave in the name of God. There it is, that when a man declares that this is a world of ideas, that it is all a dream, he casts off clothes and property to demonstrate that what he believes and thinks is true. There it is that a man sits on the bank of a river, when he has known that life is eternal, and wants to give up his body just as nothing, just as you can give up a bit of straw. Therein lies their heroism, that they are ready to face death as a brother because they are convinced that there is no death for them. Therein lies the strength that has made them invincible through hundreds of years of oppression and foreign invasion and tyranny. The nation lives to-day, and in that nation even in the days of the direst disaster, spiritual giants have never failed to arise. Asia produces giants in spirituality, just as the Occident produces giants in politics, giants in science. In the beginning of the present century, when Western influence began to pour into India, when Western conquerors, sword in hand, came to demonstrate to the children of the sages that they were mere barbarians, a race of dreamers, that their religion was but mythology, and God and soul and everything they had been struggling for, were mere words without meaning, that the thousands of years of struggle, the thousands of years of endless renunciation, had all been in vain, the question began to be agitated among young men at the universities, whether the whole national existence up to then had been a failure, whether they must begin anew on the Occidental plan, tear up their old books, burn their philosophies, drive away their preachers, and break down their temples. Did not the Occidental conqueror, the man who demonstrated his religion with sword and gun, say, that all the old ways were mere superstition and idolatry?

"As I have said, the idea of reform came to India when it seemed as if the wave of materialism that had invaded her shores would sweep away the teachings of the sages. But the nation had borne the shocks of a thousand such waves of change. This one was mild in comparison. Wave after wave had flooded the land, breaking and crushing everything for hundreds of years; the sword had flashed, and "Victory unto Allah" had rent the skies of India, but these floods subsided, leaving the national ideals unchanged.

"The Indian nation cannot be killed. Deathless it stands, and it will stand, so long as that spirit shall remain as the background, so long as her people do not give up their spirituality. Beggars they may remain, poor and poverty-stricken; dirt and squalor may surround them perhaps throughout all time, but let them not give up their God, let them not forget that they are the children of the sages. Just as in the West, even the man in the street wants to trace his descent from some robber-baron of the Middle Ages, so in India, even an Emperor on the throne wants to trace his descent from some beggar-sage in the forest, from a man who wore the bark of a tree, lived upon the fruits of the forest and communed with God. That is the type of descent we want, and so long as holiness is thus supremely venerated, India cannot die."

Return to India

On 16th December, 1896, the Swami left London for India, a man much shattered by the very hard work of four years, but yet bubbling with enthusiasm and a will that was indomitable and ready to take up any challenge. India was now the one thought that occupied his mind. On the eve of his departure a friend asked him how after his four years of life in the powerful and wealthy West, he viewed India and the experiences in store for him there. The Swami's reply was: "India I loved before I came away. Now the very dust of India has become holy to me; it is now the holy land, the place of pilgrimage, the Tirtha." The Swami was accompanied by Mr. and Mrs. Sevier from London and was joined by Mr. Goodwin at Naples. The voyage gave the Swami the much needed rest and he was in excellent spirits, thinking of India.

This voyage was noteworthy for a very strange but significant dream the Swami had one night while the ship was passing through the Mediterranean. A bearded sage appeared to him in dream and said: "Observe well this place that I show to you. You are now in the Island of Crete. This is the land in which Christianity began.' He further added: "I am one of the ancient Order of Theraputtas (sons or disciples of Theras, meaning elders of the Buddhist monastic Order) which had its origin in the teachings of the Indian Rishis. The truths and the ideals preached by us have been given out by the Christians as taught by Jesus; but for the matter of that, there was no such personality as Jesus ever born. Various evidences certifying to this fact will be brought to light by excavating here." "By excavating which place can the proofs and relics be found?" The Swami asked, and the hoary-headed sage answered, pointing to a locality in the vicinity of Turkey, "See here." The Swami immediately woke up and rushed to the deck to meet a ship's officer to ascertain the time and the ship's whereabouts. The officer informed him, "It is midnight. We are fifty miles off Crete." Till then Swamiji never doubted the historicity of Christ; but still his reverence for the Christian Saviour continued as before, just as for the Hindu Incarnations. Commenting on this, Romain Rolland remarks: "But for a spirit of his religious intensity, as of Ramakrishna as well, the historic reality of God was the least of His realities. God, the fruit of the soul of a people, is more real than he who is the fruit of the womb of a virgin. More surely is he the seed of the fire flung by the Divine."

Several months before his return to India while speaking to a friend about the tremendous difficulties he had to face in presenting Indian thought to Christian audiences, he suddenly grew emotional and cried out in a prophetic way: "India must listen to me! I shall shake India to her foundations. I shall send an electric thrill through her national veins. Wait! You shall see how

India will receive me. It is India, my own India, that knows truly how to appreciate that which I have given so freely here, and with my life blood, as the spirit of Vedanta. India will receive me in triumph." These prophetic words utterd several months before were to prove true to the very letter; for the news of the Swami's impending return had reached India, and it had already raised a great stir of expectation in the country. Grand preparations were being made everywhere to give him a fitting reception. But the Swami was quite unaware of all that, and as he approached India he had in his more worldly-wise moods doubts and misgivings about the response of conservative India to the work he had done in the West on India's behalf. For in Goodwin's letter of 14th November, 1896 to Mrs. Ole Bull it is stated: "The Swami is feeling very uncertain as to the way in which he will be received in India, and expects to get the cold shoulder to a great extent, in which case he says that he will consider his proper course to be to revisit America and England after merely a short rest in India. He intends to arrange lectures in Japan and China on his way back to the States."

Awakening of India at the Call of Vivekananda

But such a pessimistic estimate of India's response had no foundation in fact. Every important city in India was astir at the impending triumphal return of the Swami to the Motherland, and many, impatient to await his arival, were pouring towards Colombo, the port of his disembarkation. And, to quote Romain Rolland, "When he arrived on January 15, 1897, a mighty shout arose from the human throng covering the quays of Colombo. A multitude flung itself upon him to touch his feet. A procession was formed with flags at its head. Religious hymns were chanted. Flowers were thrown before his path. Rose water or sacred water from the Ganga was sprinkled, incense burned before the houses. Hundreds of visitors, rich and poor, brought him offerings. And Vivekananda once again recrossed the land of India from the South to the North, as he had done formerly as a beggar along its roads. But today his was a triumphal progress with an escort of delirious people. Rajahs prostrated themselves before him or drew his carriage. The cannon boomed and in the exotic processions wherein elephants and camels rode, choirs chanted the victory of Judas Maccabaus." Travelling through the important cities of Ceylon the Swami landed on Indian soil at Pamban in the evening of January 26, 1897. From there it was something of the nature of a triumphal procession, characterised by the presentation of addresses and thrilling replies, through the important towns and cities of the South like Rameswaram, Ramnad, Paramakudi, Manamadurai, Madurai, Kumbakonam, and Trichinopoly upto Madras.

At Madras, a city which was very familiar to the Swami in his Parivrajaka days, and where he had a large number of ardent devotees and admirers, a royal reception attended by mammoth crowds of a size that the city had never known before, was accorded to him by a committee constituted of the elite of that enlightened city. The unprecedented enthusiasm his presence produced in the city was of the nature of a new national awakening passing through the people who were lying torpid and hypnotised under the political and cultural imperialism of the West. His lectures in Madras, about half a dozen in number, form the core of his message to India. He exhorted Indians not to condemn their social past and take to a life of imitation of the West. That is the way to certain doom. Nor should they merely exalt the past and refuse to move forward. That is the way to stagnation and decadence. India has a glorious heritage. In religion and philosophy it has been the teacher of the world. India still retains the old genius in that respect. Revival of religion has always been the prelude to cultural and political revival in India. Spirituality is the soul of India. Enhancement of it is the sure way to greatness, and its erosion, the way to national suicide. This does not mean that we should not learn many valuable lessons from the West in the matter of organisation, science, politics, and technology. We have got plenty to learn from them. Our deficiency in these respects is largely the result of the mania for exclusiveness and avoidance of contact with the world outside that had crept into the soul of the nation at some time past in its history. Where the world marched forward in science and technology, India remained smug in its own shell, glorifying itself in its don't-touchism, caste obsession, and kitchen religion. These trends have to be reversed, contact established with the wide world and the contributions other countries have made for the betterment of life to be absorbed. But in that process India should on no account lose her spiritual sensitivity which has been the great national theme that India has held forth through the ages. If that happens India will lose her national identity, her national character, and she will be as good as dead. A society which combines Indian spirituality with the Western technical advancement is the ideal he held forth before his countrymen.

He, however, warned the Indian elite, that unless they carry the masses with them in all efforts at national regeneration, no great progress can be made. The neglect of the masses, the reluctance of the higher castes to make them the sharers of the wisdom of the Upanishads and the Gita, and the chronic poverty under which they were held down, have been the main cause of India's degradation, the cause for the absence of any national resistance when invader after invader marched through the heart of India. In fact, as he declared from many a platform, his main object in going to the West was not the Parliament of Religions but to see whether the affluent West would give him the wherewithal for working out his plans for the amelioration of the poverty of the masses, for whom he felt intensely. In this respect his mission to the West was a failure ; for though several devoted friends and disciples like Mrs. Ole Bull, Miss. Henrietta Muller, and Mr. and Mrs. Sevier contributed substantial amounts for the establishment of his two monastic centres, he found that man in the West as a rule was not so much concerned with the Indian mases as he was. The West, he found, was responsive to the spiritual aid that India could provide them with, but would go no further than that. There was no will to render any substantial material help to India. India has to depend for it on her own resources. His experience in the West taught him that India should never go to the West merely as a beggar either for funds or for the study of science and technology from them. There can never be equality between one who begs and one who gives. We have to give the West something in exchange, and for that we have an abundance of wealth in India's spiritual experiences for which there is great need in the West.

The message of pure and fiery patriotism, the love of the Indian people as one whole, is another great sentiment he projected through these lectures and other utterances. India is a land of many languages, religions, ethnic variations, castes and communal and provincial traditions. Though a vague sense of the cultural oneness of all people inhabiting the Indian sub-continent always existed, it was only after the unification of the whole country under British rule that people all over the land began to come together and develop a national sentiment in spite of linguistic, religious and cultural differences. Swami Vivekananda was one of the earliest achitects of the patriotic sentiment which is the basis of this national integration. His appearance on the national horizon thrilled the country as a whole, and his powerful utterances from the platforms at Madras drew the attention of the people to their national identity based on the common cultural self-consciousness and the sense of a great heritage from the past and of a still greater destiny in store for the future. Quoting the Swami, Romain Rolland writes: " For the next fifty years ..... let all other vain gods disappear for the time from our minds. This is the only god that is awake, our own race — everywhere his hands, everywhere his feet-everywhere his ears. He covers everything. All other Gods are sleeping. What vain Gods shall we go after, and yet cannot worship the God that we see all round us, the Virat?..... The first of all worship is this worship of the Virat—of those all round us. These are all our gods. — men and animals—, and the first God we have to worship is our own countrymen.' Imagine the thunderous reverberations of these words! The reader almost says with the Indian masses, and with Vivekananda himself ' Shiva..... Shiva!' The storm passed, it scattered its cataracts of water and the fire over the plains, and its formidable appeal to the force of the soul, to the God sleeping in man and his illimitable possibilities! I can see the Sage erect, his arms raised, like Jesus above the tomb of Lazarus in Rembrandt's engraving—with energy flowing from his gesture of command to raise the dead and bring him to life."

His definition of patriotism is something worth remembering by all who profess to work for the uplift of the nation. They were originally addressed to the social reformers of the time, who thought that by condemning some of India's social institutions they are doing a great patriotic service. But they are relevant even today and for all times. "I believe in patriotism", he says, "and I also have my own ideal of patriotism. Three things are necessary for great achievements. First, feel from the heart. What is in the intellect or reason? It goes a few steps and then it stops. But through the heart comes inspiration. Love opens the most impossible gates, love is the gate to all the secrets of the universe. Feel. therefore, my would-be reformers! Do you feel? Do you feel that millions and millions of the descendants of gods and sages have become next door neighbours to brutes? Do you feel that millions are starving today, and millions have been starving for ages? Do you feel that ignorance has come over the land as a dark cloud? Does it make you restless? Does it make you sleepless? Has it gone into your blood, coursing through your veins, becoming consonant with your heart-beats? Has it made you almost mad? Are you seized with that one idea of the misery, of the ruin, and have you forgotten all about your name, your fame, your wives, your children, your property, even your own bodies? Have you done that? This is the first step to become a patriot, the very first step . . . You may feel, then; but instead of spending your energies in frothy talk, have you found any way out, any practical solution, some help instead of condemnation, some sweet words to soothe their miseries, to bring them out of this living death? Yet this is not all. Have you got the will to surmount mountain-high obstructions? If you have these three things, each one of you will work miracles." These words of the Swami are very relevant today when the love of the country and its good have been expelled from the arena of national life by professionalised party politics.

In the course of the Swami's nine days of stay at Madras (from the 6th to 15th

February 1897), he delivered six grand lectures which in their power and wealth of ideas have been unrivalled by any message the country had heard before or after. Thanks to Goodwin, the stenographer, these lectures are imprinted in the pages of India's modern national literature, giving inspiration to many a genuine patriot who has taken part in India's struggle for independence. A study of these is very much needed today to restore the genuine and creative idea of nationalism and patriotism in the present generation misguided by selfish political leaders.

Consolidation of the work in India

From Madras, the Swami went by ship to Calcutta, as railway connection had not yet been established between these cities. But before leaving, he acceded to the earnest request of his devotees and admirers at Madras to start a centre of his work in the city; and in fulfilment of this, the first thing that the Swami did on reaching Calcutta on 19th February 1897 was to despatch his brother disciple Swami Ramakrishnananda to start at Madras a Math, which can claim to be the first branch of Swamiji's monastic organisation. At Calcutta, his home city, a grand reception awaited him, and he delivered two inspiring lectures there. But there were not more lectures as in the South, as he was already a sick and tired man. There were no mikes and loudspeakers in those days, and lecturing to mammoth audiences for two or more hours at a time must have defied the energies of even a strong and healthy man. The Swami felt the devastating effect of these exertions on his health, especially since he had developed symptoms of diabetes. Besides, the task of consolidating his work had a more pressing call on his time and energies. Calcutta was the city where his Great Master lived his life, and where his disciples, lay and monastic, were concentrated. He had therefore more important work to do there than lecture. At first he spent much of his time at Babu Gopal Lal Seal's garden-house at Cossipore which was provided by the reception committee as his official residence for receiving visitors and conferring with the leading men in several walks of life. He spent his evenings and nights with the community of his monastic brethren, from whose company he had parted in 1888 when he started on his career as a wandering monk. It was the Swami's earnest desire, even during the days following the Master's passing, to establish a Math where the Master's earthly relics could be interred, and round it his monastic children could gather as a community. But want of funds and public support stood in the way of the fulfilment of it at that time. So the Master's relics were kept first at Baranagar, next at Alambazar, and lastly at Nilambar Babu's building at Belur. Those places were also the Maths where the monastic community lived. Whilst most of the monks went out for long periods as Parivrajakas, Swami Ramakrishnananda stuck on to the Master's relics and maintained the continuity of the Math. Now the Swami's long-standing desire for a permanent place for the Master's relics came to fulfilment. In March 1898 he was able to buy a piece of land more than seven acres in extent, on the banks of the Ganga at Belur, at a cost of Rs. 39,000, the amount being donated by Miss F. Henrietta Muller, an ardent English devotee of the Swami. An American follower of the Swami, Mrs. Ole Bull contributed the money required for the building of the Belur Math, and she donated also more than a lakh as an endowment for the monastery. On January 2, 1899 the construction of the Belur Math was completed, and the Math was consecrated as the permanent resting place of the Master's relics and the monastic centre from which Sri Ramakrishna's teachings were to radiate all the world over in due time. A little later, in March 1899, was founded the Advaita Ashrama, a beautiful and extensive estate at Mayavati in the snow-bound Himalayan heights at an altitude of about 7,000 feet. This was established under the Swami's guidance by two ardent English disciples, Captain and Mrs. Sevier for the practice of Advaita Vedanta and to provide for the Western disciples a place to practise Vedantic disciplines in a climatic condition agreeable to them. Thus it will be seen that it was neither the people, nor the wealthy men, nor the Maharajas of India that helped Swami Vivekananda lay the stable foundation required for his work, but a few very earnest Western devotees and disciples. Therefore the followers of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda have to pay their homage always to these four Westerners, men and women.

Side by side with the establishment of the Math, which is essentially a body of monastics, the Swami also founded an organisation where the monastic and lay disciples of Sri Ramakrishna could come together for the promotion of the ideals of spirituality and service. At a meeting on May 1, 1897, the Swami founded an Association called the Ramakrishna Mission consisting of all the lay and monastic disciples of the Master. "The aim of the Sangha is to preach those truths which Sri Ramakrishna has, for the good of humanity, preached and demonstrated by practical application in his own life, and to help others to put these truths into practice in their lives for their temporal, mental, and spiritual advancement." The Swami had very soon the satisfaction of seeing the Mission engaging itself in important works of service. In 1897 the first famine relief work of the mission was organised by Swami Akhandananda in Murshidabad District, and the next year, plague relief work by his disciples like Nivedita and others, following the plague epidemic in Calcutta that year. Preaching activity in various parts of Madras Presidency was started by Swami Ramakrishnananda, and in Ceylon by Swami Shivananda. Swami Saradananda and Abhedananda had gone for Vedanta work in England and America. In Calcutta the mission organised public meetings addressed by Sister Nivedita and the Swamis. As a part of work to help women, Sister Nivedita opened her school for girls. Two organs of the Movement, the *Prabuddha Bharata* in English and the *Udbodhan* in Bengali, began publication. Thus during the two years of his stay in India from February 1897 to August 1899, when he went to the West again, the Swami had the satisfaction of setting the wheel of the Master's work set in motion in an organised form.

Opposition silenced

These efforts of the Swami to give a new turn to monasticism by insisting on works of service to the poor, and making the followers of Vedanta a body of preachers, and to project patriotism as a supreme value—did not go at first without some opposition even from among some of his own conservative brother disciples. They held the view that the Master was an uncompromising preacher of renunciation of all worldly values and always advised his disciples to gain realisation through Bhakti and meditation. To engage oneself in works of service and preaching only made aspirants into extroverts, whereas realisation required them to become more inward-looking. Patriotism, however great it might be as a social value, had nothing to do with a seeker after Moksha. They felt that the Swami's ideas of organisation and preaching and founding of Maths and centres of work were all Western ideas and had nothing to do with the Master's teaching. The Swami overcame their opposition mainly by appealing to their loyalty to the Master who, they all knew, had placed them under his leadership and guidance. What he was now directing them to do was what the Master had inspired him to propagate at the proper time. What else was the meaning of the Master commanding them not to be merged in perpetual

Samadhi but be like a spreading tree under which people for generations to come might seek shelter? What else is the implication of the Master's inspired saying, which they all had heard—"Who are you, man, to show kindness to creatures! Not kindness but service to all as worship of the God within?" Did not the Master teach that there is no religion for empty stomachs? To seek selfish salvation was not what the Master stood for. To forget one's own salvation while working in the true devotional spirit for the good of all, is the highest form of Sadhana. The Master did not come for the salvation of a few who came into contact with him, but to show a path of salvation for generations yet to come. Is it not the duty of his chosen disciples to exert in every way to bring his message to people all over the world? Ramakrishna, he pointed out, is far greater than what his disciples understood him to be. He is the embodiment of infinite spiritual ideas capable of development in infinite ways. Whether the conservatives were fully convinced or not, their acceptance of the Swami as the medium through which the Master expressed his will, brought them round to fall in line with the life of action chalked out by him.

More travelling and lecturing

While these works of consolidation were going on, the Swami could not stay at the Math for long, as he had to go out to stations outside for reasons of health; but wherever he went, he could not get the rest he sorely needed. Crowds besieged him and drew him into strenuous programmes of lectures and discussions. On medical advice, he had to go for rest to the hill-station of Darjeeling; for, as he wrote to Mrs. Hale on 28th April, ". . . . .. . I was already exhausted by hard work in England, and this tremendous exertion in the heat of Southern India prostrated me completely. I had of course to give up visiting other parts of India and fly up to the nearest hill station, Darjeeling. Now I feel much better, and a month more in Almora would complete the cure." But the expected cure from this holiday trip as well as those that followed proved only marginal; for he was in the grip of the fell disease diabetes, for which there was no effective treatment in those days. The irrevocable wasting effect of this ailment along with that of the tremendous exertion involved in speaking at numerous meetings in the West and at mammoth gatherings in India for several years, without any speaking aids like microphones that are available in modern days, was playing havoc with his health.

The Swami had to return to Calcutta within a month for fulfilling an urgent engagement. After that he left for Almora on 6th May, 1897, and had an extended tour, partly missionary and partly in quest of health, over a wide stretch of North-Western India. From various towns of the Punjab, Sind, Rajputana etc., invitations came in large numbers for his presence in those places, and in all the places he visited grand receptions were extended to him. He touched Almora, Bareilly, Ambala, Amritsar, Dharmasala, Murree, Baramulla and Srinagar. At Srinagar he moved about the important places of sight-seeing in a house-boat peculiar to Kashmir through shallow waterways, which gave him the much-needed solitude and rest. Next he went to Rawalpindi and from there to Jammu where he had several interviews and discussions with the Maharaja of Kashmir. He next proceeded to Lahore via Sialkot. At Lahore especially, several receptions were given to him, and he delivered there some of his most famous lectures like the one entitled the *Vedanta*. Illness again took him to Dehra Dun in the hills. From there he went to Delhi, and left it on the 1st of December 1897 for Khetri, whose ruler Ajit Singh was an ardent disciple of his. Ajit Singh had borne the expenses of his first trip to the West. On the way he touched Alwar and Jaipur. Leaving Khetri, he travelled rapidly through Ajmer, Jodhpur and Indore on his way to Khandwa, from where he entrained directly to Calcutta, cancelling for reasons of health several invitations and proposed engagements in Sindh, Kathiawar, Gujarat, Baroda etc. He reached Calcutta in the second week of January 1898, thus concluding his preaching tour of India.

From the time of his return to Calcutta till his departure to the West for the second time in 1899 the Swami engaged himself mostly in training the new disciples who had joined the Monastic order, whose head Math was moved in February 1898 from Alambazar to Nilambar Mukherji's Garden situated in the Village of Belur, where the permanent Math of the Order was then under construction on the site acquired on the banks of the Ganges. There were also with him at that time several of his intimate Western disciples like Miss Muller, Mrs. Ole Bull, Miss MacLeod, and Miss Margaret Noble who later became his dedicated worker under the name of Sister Nivedita. The Swami spent a good deal of his time in Hinduising their outlook, especially of Nivedita, who had come down to India to stay there permanently and work for the women of India. These disciples camped near the Math when the Swami was in Calcutta and moved with him when he went to Darjeeling and other places for the recovery of health. In May 1898, he again went to Almora via Nainital accompanied by his Western disciples and some of his monastic brethren. His work of moulding the outlook of Western disciples continued throughout the whole sojourn. At Almora the Swami received the news of the demise of three persons whom he loved very much— Goodwin his faithful disciple and stenographer, the Saint Pavhari Baba whom he revered next only to his Great Master, and Rajam Aiyar the talented editor of his magazine the *Prabhuddha Bharata* which was then being brought out from Madras.

Memorable visits to Amarnath and Kshirbhavani

One June 11 he left Almora with his Western disciples for Kashmir and other Himalayan places of pilgrimage. A very vivid account of the Swami's travels through the hills, dales, and the waterways of Kashmir with its enthralling scenery revealing Nature's beauty in its most sublime aspect, has been given by Sister Nivedita in her book, *Wanderings with Swami Vivekananda*. We shall describe here only his visits to the two famous Himalayan pilgrimage centres of Amarnath and Kshirbhavani. Amarnath temple of Siva is an extensive ice-covered cave at an elevation of 18,000 ft. in the Himalayas. The journey to it is very strenuous, as one has to negotiate steep ascents and descents in the hills, and walk along glaciers. The cold too is intense. It was then the pilgrimage season, and about 2,000 pilgrims, both monks and lay men, were on their way. The Swami took only Nivedita with him, while the other disciples were asked to stay at a base camp. The Swami observed all the strenuous rules of pilgrimage like bath in ice-cold water, fasting, worship with all ceremonials, wearing wet clothes in certain regions, walking along very difficult terrain etc., in spite of his failing health. When he entered the Cave after taking bath, his whole frame was shaking with emotion. The Cave itself was "large enough to hold a cathedral", and within it in a shadowy niche stood the huge ice Linga of Siva—a well-shaped shining mass of ice, white like camphor, and with drops of water dripping on it from the vault above in perpetual worship. The Swami fell into an ecstatic mood before that awesome Presence and " so saturated did he become with the presence of the Great God that for days after he could speak of nothing else. Siva was all in all—Siva the Eternal One, the Great Monk, rapt in contemplation, aloof from the world."

After his return to Srinagar from the pilgrimage to Amarnath, he fell into a mood of Mother-worship. His absorption in it was felt like a 'malady of thought' which consumed him, leaving no time for sleep or rest. In the night of 2nd September when he had gone to a solitary place in his houseboat, he seems to have had a vivid experience of the Mother like the one he had at Dakshineswar. With his attention wholly centred on the dark, the painful and the inscrutable in the world, and determined to reach by that particular road, the one behind phenomena, he had a vision of Kali the Terrible, the exaltation of which experience he conveyed in a short poem entitled *Kali the Mother*, which runs:

The stars are blotted out,
The clouds are covering clouds.
It is darkness vibrant, sonant.
In the roaring, whirling wind
Are the souls of a million lunatics,
Just loose from the prison house
Wrenching trees by the roots,
Sweeping all from the path.
The sea has joined the fray,
And swirls up mountain-waves,
To reach the pitchy sky.

The flash of lurid light
Reveals on every side
A thousand, thousand shades
Of Death begrimed and black—
Scattering plagues and sorrows,
Dancing mad with joy
Come, Mother, come!
For Terror is Thy name,
Death is in Thy breath,
And every shaking step
Destroys a world for e'er.
Thou "Time", the All-Destroyer!
Come, O Mother, come!
Who dares misery love,
And hug the form of Death,
Dance in destruction's dance,
To him the Mother comes.

At the end of writing it, the pen fell down from his hand, and he lay as if dead in the ecstatic swoon of Bhava Samadhi. Thenceforth he began to talk to his disciples on the worship of the Terrible and the discovery of the sweet face of the Mother in pain. He said, " It is a mistake to hold with all men that pleasure is the motive. Quite as many are born to seek pain. There can be bliss in torture too. Let us worship Terror for its own sake." Again: "Learn to recognise the Mother as instinctively in evil, terror, sorrow and annihilation as in that which makes for sweetness and joy." or "Only by the worship of the Terrible, can the Terrible itself be overcome and immortality gained. Meditate on Death! Meditate on Death! Worship the Terrible! And the Mother Herself is Brahman...The heart must become a cremation ground—pride, selfishness and desire all burnt into ashes. Then and then alone will the Mother come!"

Following this experience, the Swami returned alone on September 30th to the coloured springs of Kshir-Bhavani, where there is a famous shrine of the Mother. For six days the Swami practised severe austerities there. Every day he performed Homa and made milk offering to the Mother. In temperament he changed entirely into the Child of the Mother, and the thought of the Leader, Worker, Teacher etc., disappeared from his awareness. Six days after, he returned to the place where his disciples were camping, a transfigured presence, and in the course of his talk on his experiences he said: "All my patriotism is gone. Everything is gone. I have ceased making any more plans. Now it is only Mother! Mother!" He had a strange experience at Kshir-Bhavani. This temple, once attacked and destroyed by Muslims, was in a dilapidated condition. Sitting there amidst the ruins, he thought how he would have laid down his life if he were there at that time to defend the temple. He then heard the Mother's voice actually telling him: "What even if unbelievers should enter My temple and defile My image! What is that to you? Do you protect me? Or do I protect you? If I so wish, I can have innumerable temples and monasteries. I can even this moment raise a seven-storied golden temple on this very spot." Next reciting from his own poem, Kali the Mother, the Swami said to his disciples: "I have hugged the Form of Death." In his meditation on the Terrible, in the dark hours of the night at Kshir-Bhavani, there were other visions that he confided only to one or two of the brother-disciples. They were too sacred to be made known to all.

By the 18th of October 1898, the Swami and party returned to Calcutta. The Swami's health had in no way improved. The biting cold and the exertion of hill climbing and the strain of intense mystic experience had left his heart permanently enlarged. The mood of his mind too, had changed. He was also suffering from asthma. He wrote to a disciple at this time. "I am now in Bhakti. As I am growing old, Bhakti is taking the place of Jnana."

Consecration of Belur Math

The Swami was, however, again thinking of making a second trip to the West, at the request of close friends and disciples. But before that, a great event in his life took place, and that was the consecration of the new and permanent Math of the Ramakrishna Order on the 9th December, 1898. The Swami himself performed the ceremonial worship of Sri Ramakrishna's relics that day, and then the jar of relics was taken in procession to the new Math, the Swami carrying the jar on his own right shoulder at the head of the procession. The Swami explained this conduct of his to a disciple thus: "The Master once told me, ' I will go and live wherever it will be your pleasure to take me, carrying me on your shoulders—

be it under a tree or in the humblest cottage.' With faith in that gracious promise, I myself am now carrying him to the site of our future Math. Know for certain, my boy, that so long as his name inspires his followers with his ideals of purity, holiness, and loving spirit of charity to all men, even so long shall he, the Master, sanctify the place with his hallowed presence." He himself did the worship, cooked Payasam and made an offering of it, and lit the sacred fire for Viraja Homa. At the conclusion of the ceremonies, he addressed the gathering, saying: "Do all of you, my brothers, pray to the Lord with all your heart and soul, that He, the Divine Incarnation of the age, may bless this place with his hallowed presence for ever and ever, and make it a unique centre—a Punyabhumi— of harmony of all religions and sects, for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many."

Afterwards, the Swami said to a disciple : " By the will of the Lord is established today this Dharma Kshetra. Today I feel free from the weight of the responsi--bility which I have carried with me for twelve long years. And now a vision comes to my mind! This Math shall become a great centre of learning and spiritual practices. Pious householders will erect houses for themselves on the grounds round the future religious university and live there, with the Sannyasins in the centre. To the south, the followers of the Lord from England and America will come and make their abode." Turning to the disciple, he asked triumphantly, "What dou you think?" The disciple respectfully expressed his doubt whether this 'most excellent piece of fancy' would ever materialise. "Fancy, do you say!" the Swami cried out, "hear me, O you of little faith! Time will fulfil my expectations. I am now only laying the foundation, as it were. Great things will came later on. I shall do my share of the task, and I shall instill into you all the various ideas that you will in the future have to work out. The highest principles and ideals of religion have not only to be studied and comprehended, but brought into the practical field of life. Do you understand?" From December 9th, the day of the above installation, a few monks began to stay at the new Math premises, but it was only on the 2nd January 1899 that the whole Math was transferred from Nilambar Mukherji's Garden-house to the new buildings, which were till then under construction.

Second Voyage to the West

The few months following the installation were spent by the Swami in training his monastic disciples and in visits to places like Baidyanath at Deoghar for the sake of health. For, in addition to his general ill-health with diabetes as the basic factor, he had contracted, after his Kashmir trip, a very bad type of asthma too, which almost suffocated him on occasions. As early as December 1898, the Swami had announced his intention to go to the West a second time to see how the work he had initiated was going on, but he had to postpone it due to reasons of health and engagements at home. Now the physicians who were treating him, themselves recommended a long sea voyage for him, and so on June 20th of 1899, he started for the West accompanied by Swami Turiyananda and Sister Nivedita.

On the way the ship touched Madras

harbour, but the Swami could not disembark owing to the quarantine rule in force for 'native' passengers from the plague-infected city of Calcutta. So Swami Ramakrishnananda and Swamiji's devotees as also a large number of citizens of Madras went in country crafts to the ship and greeted the Swami who stood on board the deck of the ship. At Colombo also a large body of citizens came to meet him. Much of the distance the ship had to pass through very rough seas, and consequently could reach London only after a voyage of forty-two days. For various reasons his stay in England this time was only for about two weeks, and he set sail for America on August 17th, 1899. He reached New York on August 28th. He was glad to see how Swami Abhedananda had established Vedanta work on a firm foundation. He was given a public reception on 7th November by friends and admirers, whose number had by this time increased through the reading of his books that had by then been printed. Being off-season and also for reasons of health, he did not give many public lectures in New York but spent much of his time in the countryside, Ridgely, relaxing. He was during these days getting a glimpse of a strange foreboding regarding his life on this mortal plane. He told Swami Abhedananda who had established the Vedanta work firmly in New York, "Well, my brother, my days are numbered. I shall live only for three or four years at the most." When Swami Abhedananda tried to dissuade him from such pessimistic thoughts and pointed out that he had now seen only the beginning of the work, the Swami replied significantly, giving a glimpse of his inner life: "You do not understand me, brother. I feel that I am growing very big. My self is expanding so much that at times I feel as if my body could not contain me any more. I am about to burst. Surely, this cage of flesh and blood cannot hold me for many days more!"

After about three months' stay at New York and Ridgely, he suddenly decided to go to California on the west coast and started on 22nd November, stopping on the way at Chicago for a week. Though his health was in a poor condition and his zest for work had very much abated, for about six months he engaged himself in vigorous preaching work. Once he started speaking, he showed no signs of exhaustion.

Two quotations from the reports of close friends of Swamiji about his ministry during this second visit to the West will illustrate the point. Writes Brahmachari Gurudas, an American national: "Swamiji was so simple in his behaviour, so like one of the crowd that he did not impress me so much when I first saw him. There was nothing about his ways that would mark him as the lion of New York society, as so often he had been . Simple in dress and behaviour, he was just like one of us. He did not put himself aside on a pedestal, as is so often the case with lionized personages. He walked about the room, sat on the floor, laughed, joked, chatted—nothing formal. Of course, I had noticed his magnificent, brilliant eyes, his beautiful features and majestic bearing, for these were parts of him that no circumstance could hide. But when I saw him for a few minutes standing on a platform surrounded by others, it flashed into my mind: 'What a giant, what strength, what manliness, what a personality! Eve1yone near him looks so insignificant compared with him.' It came to me almost as a shock; it seemed to startle me. What was it that gave Swamiji this distinction ? Was it his height? No, there were gentlemen there taller than he was. Was it his build? No, there were near him some very fine specimens of American manhood. It seemed to be more in the expression of the face than anything else. Was it his purity? What was it? I could not analyse it. I remembered what has been said of Lord Buddha,— 'a lion amongst men". I felt that Swamiji had unlimited power, that he could move heaven and earth if he willed it. This was my strongest and lasting impression of him."

We get a supplementary picture, very intimate and delightful, of Swamiji's preaching during this time from the following reminiscences of Mr. Rhodehamel:

"It is now more than ten years since the Swami Vivekananda lectured to California audiences; it seems but yesterday. It was here as elsewhere; the audiences were his from the outset and remained his to the end. They were swept along on the current of his thought without resistance. Many there were who did not want to resist, whose pleasure and novelty it was to have light thrown into the hidden recesses of their minds by the proximity of a luminous personality. There were a few who would have resisted if they could, but whose powers of resistance were neutralized by the irresistible logic, acumen, and childlike simplicity of the Great Teacher. Indeed, there were a few who arose to differ, but who resumed their seats either in smiling acquiescence or in bewildered impotency.

"The Swami's personality impressed itself on the mind with visual intensity. The speaking eyes, the wealth of facial expression, and gesticulation, the wondrous Sanskrit chanting, sonorous and melodious, impressing one with the sense of mystic potency, the translations following in smiling confidence—all these, set off by the spectacular apparel of the Hindu Sannyasin —who can forget them?

"As a lecturer he was unique: never referring to notes, as most lecturers do; and though he repeated many discourses on request, they were never mere repetitions. He seemed to be giving something of himself, to be speaking from a super-experience.

The most abstruse points of the Vedanta were retrieved from the domain of mere speculation by a vital something which seemed to emanate from him. His utterances were dynamic and constructive, arousing thought and directing it into a synthetic process. Thus he was not only a lecturer but a Teacher of the highest order as well.

"Quick, and when necessary, sharp at repartee, he met all opposition with the utmost good nature and even enjoyment. His business was to make his hearers understand, and he succeeded as, perhaps, no other lecturer on abstruse subjects ever did. To popularize abstractions, to place them within the mental grasp of even very ordinary intellects, was his achievement. He reached them all. 'In India,' he said, 'they tell me that I ought not to teach Advaita Vedanta to the people at large. But I say that I can make even a child understand it. You cannot begin too early to teach the highest spiritual truths.'

"He held purity to be needed for the householder as well as for the monk, and laid great stress on that point. 'The other day, a young Hindu came to see me,' he said, 'He has been living in this country for about two years, and suffering from ill-health for some time. In the course of our talk, he said that the theory of chastity must be all wrong because the doctors in this country had advised him against it. They told him that it was against the law of Nature. I asked him to go back to India, where he belonged, and to listen to the teachings of his ancestors, who had practised chastity for thousands of years.' Then turning a face puckered into an expression of unutterable disgust, he thundered: 'You doctors in this country, who hold that chastity is against the law of Nature, you don't know what you are talking about. You don't know the meaning of the word purity. You are beasts, beasts, I say, with the morals of a tomcat, if that is the best you have to say on that subject!' Here he glanced defiantly over the audience, challenging opposition by his very glance. No voice was raised, though there were several physicians present.

"Bombs were thrown in all his lectures. Audiences were jolted out of hereditary ruts, and New Thought students, so-called, were subjected to scathing though constructive criticisms without mercy. Smilingly, he would announce the most stupendous Vedantic conceptions so opposed to Christian theologicol dogmas; then pause an instant—how many, many times, and with such winsome effect!—with his teeth pressed on his lower lip as though with bated breath observing the result. Imagine, if you can, greater violence done to the traditional teachings of Christendom than by his fiery injunction. 'Don't repent! Don't repent!... Spit, if you must, but go on! Don't hold yourselves down by repenting! Throw off the load of sin, if there is such a thing, by knowing your true selves —the Pure! the Ever Free!.... That man is blasphemous who tells you that you are sinners...' And again, 'This world is a superstition. We are hypnotized into believing it real. The process of salvation is the process of de-hypnotization ......This universe is just the play of the Lord—that is all. It is all just for fun. There can be no reason for His doing anything. 'Know the Lord if you would understand His play. Be His play-fellows, and He will tell you all...And to you, who are philosophers, I say that to ask for a reason for the existence of the universe is illogical, because it implies limitation in God, which you do not admit.' Then he entered into one of his wonderful expositions of the salient features of the Advaita Vedanta."

Besides his old admirers, his published books drew many more hearers to his talks and speeches. In April 1900 he founded the Vedanta Centre of San Francisco, besides study groups at Los Angeles, Pasadena, Oakland, Alameda etc. As Goodwin, his devoted shorthand assistant, was no more, many of these lectures have not been preserved. Having received an invitation to participate in the Congress of the History of Religions in connection with the Paris Exhibition of September 1900, he left California for New York on 30th May, leaving the work on the West Coast in the hands of Swami Turiyananda, who was specially commissioned to establish a Retreat, the Shanti Ashrama in a mountainous area of 160 acres at San Antone Valley, California. He spent a month and a half at New York, concerning himself mostly with the new edition of his *Karma Yoga* and the publication of his London lectures on *Jnana Yoga*. He sailed for Paris on the 26th July, 1900. At the Paris

Exhibition there was nothing like the Parliament of Religions of 1893 at Chicago. There was only a Congress concerned with the history of religions, as the Catholic power in the country would not have allowed a full-fledged Parliament. The Swami was asked to take part in the discussions of the origin of Vedic religion and of the worship of Sivalinga and Salagrama. Much of his time he spent in the study of French history and culture, on which he has made several significant remarks in his *East and West*, and *Memoirs of European Travels*.

Return to India

On October 24th, 1900, he left Paris after a stay of three months, for a journey across the European continent to Constantinople, accompanied by Monsieur and Madame Loyson, Jules Bois, the famous opera singer Madame Calve and Miss Josephine MacLeod. He passed through Hungary, Serbia, Rumania and Bulgaria, and stayed at Constantinople for three days. From there, he sailed for Greece, visited Athens and its marvellous relics of ancient Greek culture and from there sailed for Egypt. While at Cairo, he had some premonition of the fate of Captain Sevier, his dear disciple and friend at Mayavati, and so he suddenly decided to return to India. On 26th November he boarded a steamer to India and reached Bombay on 6th of December.

Giving her impression of Swamiji's state of mind during this, his last visit to the West, Nivedita writes: "The outstanding impression made on me by the Swami's bearing during all those months of European and American life was one of almost complete indifference to his surroundings. Current estimates of value left him entirely unaffected. Both victory and defeat would come and go. He was their witness. 'Why should I care, if the world itself were to disappear?' he said once. 'According to my philosophy, that, you know, would be a very good thing.' But in fact, he added, in tones suddenly graver, 'All that is against me must be with me in the end. Am I not Her soldier?' "

At Mayavati, the home of Advaita

Swamiji thus reached Bombay on the 6th December without any previous intimation and there was none to receive him. On December 9th, he arrived at Belur Math after dusk, unannounced, when the monastics were all taking their night meal. The gardener conveyed the news of his arrival with the words, "A Sahib has come!" and to their pleasant surprise the monastics found the Sahib rushing to their midst, revealing himself to be none other than Swamiji. His health was now ruined, but still he took up the direction of the work in India and the teaching and training of his brother-monks and disciples during the few days he stayed at the Math. For, on reaching the Math he learned that Mr. Sevier had already passed away, and he wanted to hurry to Mayavati to condole and console Mrs. Sevier. So after a stay of only a little more than two weeks at Belur Math, he started for Mayavati on the 27th of December and reached that place on the 3rd of January, 1901, after a very trying journey along hill roads in inclement weather attended by hail storm and heavy snowfall. During the few days of his stay at Mayavati he charged Swami Swarupananda, his disciple, with the duty of conducting the Advaita Ashram on the lines he had already announced earlier. It was to be run as a centre for the practice of pure Advaita without any dualistic forms of devotional worship. Regarding its ideal, the Swami had written much earlier in March, 1899, to its joint founders, Mr. and Mrs. Sevier, as follows: "In Whom is the universe, Who is in the universe, Who is the universe; in Whom is the soul, Who is in the soul, Who is the soul of man--knowing Him, and therefore, the universe, as our Self, alone extinguishes all fear, brings an end to misery and leads to infinite freedom. Wherever there has been expansion in love, or progress in the well-being of individuals or of numbers, it has been through the perception, realization and the particularization of the Eternal Truth—the Oneness of all Beings. 'Dependence is misery, Independence is happiness.' The Advaita is the only system which gives unto man complete possession of himself, takes off all dependence and its associated superstitions, thus making us brave to suffer, brave to do, and in the long run attain to absolute freedom.

"Hitherto it has not been possible to preach this Noble Truth entirely free from the settings of dualistic weakness; this alone, we are convinced, explains why it has not been more operative and useful to mankind at large.

"To give this One Truth a free and fuller scope in elevating the lives of individuals and leavening the mass of mankind, we start this Advaita Ashrama on the Himalayan heights, the land of its first expression.

"Here it is hoped to keep Advaita free from all superstitions and weakening contaminations. Here will be taught and practised nothing but the Doctrine of Unity, pure and simple; and though in entire sympathy with all other systems, this Ashrama is dedicated to Advaita and Advaita alone."

So when he found that some of the inmates had started a regular shrine room with a photo of Sri Ramakrishna and ritualistic worship, he came down very heavily on them for violating its fundamental principle. The shrine room soon disappeared after this. The inmates were only to practise the subjective side of religion—meditation, study of scriptures and teaching of the highest spiritual monism. Referring to this incident, the Swami remarked on returning to Belur Math, "I thought of having one centre at least where the external worship of Sri Ramakrishna would not find a place. But going there I found that the Old Man had already established himself even there! Well! Well!"

Execution of Belur Math Trust

On the 13th of January the Swami completed his 38th year, and on the 18th, he left Mayavati, reaching Belur Math on the 24th. One of the important things he did on his return to the Math was the execution of the Belur Math Trust deed on the 6th of February, 1901. The Math and its assets, which were till then standing in the Swami's name, were transferred to a Board of Trustees consisting of his brother disciples—Swamis Brahmananda, Premananda, Shivananda, Saradananda, Akhandananda, Trigunatitananda, Ramakrishnananda, Advaitananda, Subodhananda, Abhedananda and Turiyananda; Swami Adbhutananda being excluded from it at his own express desire. Having settled all the urgent administrative matters of Belur Math, he started, in spite of his fast deteriorating health, to Dacca in East Bengal (now Bangladesh), from where urgent calls were coming to him. His zeal for ministering to the spiritual needs of men was now so great that disregarding the effect of exertion on himself, he delivered several long public lectures at Dacca and Shillong before huge audiences, besides giving interviews and instructions to countless men who besieged him at all hours of the day. Among the other places he visited during this trip were the pilgrimage centres of Chandranath and Kamakhya, besides Nag Mahashaya's village home at Deobhog.

He returned to the Math, very ill with diabetes and asthma, on 12th May, 1901. At the earnest request of his brother disciples, he stayed at the Math, relaxing himself for some time. But there was to be no rest for him till the last moment of his life. He was already planning, as he wrote to Swami Ramakrishnananda on 3rd June, a preaching tour to Bombay and from there via Poona and Mysore to Madras. But this did not come off, most probably due to reasons of health. In November, 1901, he had the Durga Pooja done on a grand scale with the observance of all rituals, in the immediate presence of the Holy Mother. The celebration enhanced the prestige of the Math among orthodox circles. In December of the same year, the session of the Indian National Congress was held at Calcutta and several distinguished national leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak and M. K. Gandhi came to the Math to see the Swami.

Last pilgrimage and return

Soon, on the 6th of January, 1902, there arrived from Japan Mr. Okakura with Miss JosephineMacLeod,who was for longprompting the Swami through correspondence to undertake a missionary tour to Japan. In spite of his bad health, the Swami had sometime back the idea of accepting the invitation and extending that tour further to China and to America too, but the doctors had ordered him absolute bed rest. His plan therefore had to be given up, and so Mr. Okakura came to meet the Swami and personally invite him for the Congress of Religions to be held in Japan. He also wanted to visit the holy places of Buddhism. The Swami accompanied Okakura to Bodh Gaya on what proved to be his last pilgrimage.

Bodh Gaya, the place of the Buddha's enlightenment, was the first pilgrimage centre he visited during the days of his discipleship under his Great Master. And now his present visit to that place again proved to be his last pilgrimage. On the 29th of January, 1902, his 39th birthday, he arrived at Gaya with the party, worshipped at Vishnu-pad and proceeded from there to Bodh Gaya, which is a few miles away from there. He stayed there for about a week as a guest of the Hindu Mahant of the Bodh Gaya Temple, and thence proceeded to Varanasi, where he was given a crowded reception. His presence at Varanasi gave an impetus to a service institution run by some young men under the name 'Poor Men's Relief Association'. He had it renamed as 'The Ramakrishna Home of Service' and issued an appeal for funds in its name. In later years it was affiliated to the Mission, and developed into the present well-known centre of medical relief, the Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service.

His extraordinary mental powers in his last days

On March 8th he returned to Belur Math from this, his last pilgrimage. His health was now fast deteriorating. His one eye had practically lost its sight. His legs had swollen, and he could not move about and make a public appearance at the celebration of Sri Ramakrishna's birthday on March 16th. It was during this time that he was put under the treatment of a well-known Ayurvedic physician, Mahananda Sen Gupta. His rigorous regimen required that the patient should not take any water or salt during the course of the treatment. In spite of all physical ailments, the Swami's mental powers seemed to be at their peak even now. While undergoing the above rigorous course of treatment, his favourite disciple Saratchandra Chakravarty expressed wonder how the Swami, who was in the habit of taking water several times in that very hot summer, was managing to observe the strict order of the physician. The Swami replied: "When I decided to begin the treatment, I imposed this vow upon myself, and now no water will go down my throat. For twenty-one days I have refrained from water, and now, in rinsing out my mouth, I find that the muscles of my throat close of their own accord against the passage of a single drop. What the mind dictates, the body will have to carry out."

During this very period he was going through the newly published edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica. The same disciple Saratchandra, on seeing these shining volumes on the shelf, remarked that one could not master these volumes even in a life time. But Swamiji, who had already finished reading ten volumes and was reading the eleventh, asked the disciple challengingly: "What do you mean? Ask me whatever you like from these ten volumes, and I can answer it satisfactorily." Out of curiosity the disciple took out the books and put two or three questions from several of those volumes. The Swami not only answered all these highly technical questions, but even quoted the very language of the books in several cases. To the astounded disciple, who remarked that it was beyond human powers, the Swami replied that it was not anything miraculous, but within the capacity of anyone observing the strictest Brahmacharya.

Another remarkable expression of his spiritual powers in these last days took place one evening while he was sitting under the mango tree in the Math courtyard. With his eyes luminous and his whole frame alive with some strange spiritual consciousness, he exclaimed to the Sannyasins and Brahmacharins standing about him: "And where will you go to seek Brahman? He is immanent in all beings. Here, here, is the visible Brahman! Shame on those who, discarding the visible Brahman, set their minds on other things! Here is the Brahman before you as tangible as a fruit in your hand. Here, here, here is the Brahman!" He spoke those words charged with such fervour and power derived from his immediate experience of Brahman, that their utterance raised the level of consciousness of the listeners who all stood motionless but silent for a few minutes, absorbed in the peace and insight of deep meditation.

It would thus be seen that, as in the case of his Master, physical ailment did not in any way affect his spiritual consciousness and mental strength based on it. And though he ceased to make public appearances and go on lecturing tours during these last months of his life, his zeal for promoting the work he had started in the Master's name continued unabated. Still, as he felt that his end was nearing, he entrusted the work to his brother disciples, and withdrew from active participation. "How often," he said, "does a man ruin his disciples by remaining always with them! When men are once trained, it is essential that the leader leaves them; for without his absence they cannot develop themselves."

The last two months of his life

During the last two months of his life he grew more and more introspective and spent much time in meditation. He told Nivedita, "A great Tapasya and meditation have come upon me, and I am making ready for death." His behaviour and speech in those days portended the approaching end, to the great dismay of his brother disciples who always remembered the Master's prophecy that when Naren came to know who and what he really was, he would give up the body. One day, while talking of the old days, one of them inadvertently asked him whether he had come to know his own identity, to which his Master had referred. His surprising reply was: "Yes, I know now." He now wanted to see all his Sannyasin disciples and wrote to them all to to come and meet him. About a week before he was to pass away, he had the Bengali Calendar brought to him. He scrutinised it, as if to decide about something. Its implication was understood only afterwards. It was to select a day for ending his earthly life, and the day he selected was the 4th of July.

On July 2nd, two days before his end, he fed his disciple Nivedita, serving her food with his own hand, and at the end poured water for her to wash her hand and then dried it with a towel. When Nivedita protested saying that it was she who should serve him in these ways, he answered in a solemn and startling manner: "Jesus washed the feet of his disciples !" In reply to his words, she was about to say, "But that was the last time," but she withheld her remark understanding the implication of the Swami's words.

Three days before his passing, he walked with Swami Premananda up and down the lawn of the Math by the side of the Ganges and pointing to a particular spot there, said to his brother disciple gravely: "When I give up the body, cremate it there." On that spot stands today the temple in his honour. On his last day, the Maha-samadhi day, his actions were all deliberate and full of meaning. Getting up very early, he entered the shrine of the Math and closing its windows and doors, spent three hours in meditation. Then coming down to the courtyard of the Math, he paced it up and down in a grave and indrawn mood, the tenseness of which was released in a whispering soliloquy loud enough to be heard by Swami Premananda who was close by. "If there was another Vivekananda," he was heard to mutter, "he would have understood what Vivekananda has done! And yet, how many Vivekanandas shall be born in time!"

That day he came to the common dining hall to take his lunch with all the brethren, breaking his usual habit of taking his food in his room. He then expressed, as Nivedita records, his three wishes—to do something for Japan, to have the Kali Pooja done at the math, and to see R. C. Dutt the famous scholar and administrator. He had the Sukla-yajur-veda brought from the library and a certain passage read. He expressed his disapproval of the interpretation of the word 'Sushumna' in it by the commentator Mahidhara and charged his disciples that they should try to discover the true import of the Vedic Mantras and make original reflections and commentaries on the Sastras.

At 1 p.m. he had all the Brahmacharins assembled and took for them a class on Sanskrit Grammar lasting nearly three hours. A little later in the evening he had a stroll with Swami Premananda for a distance of about two miles, and in the course of it expressed his desire to have a Vedic college at the Math. Returning to the Math he had some chat with the monks and when the bell for Vesper Service rang, he retired to his own room and sat in meditation for an hour, asking the attending disciple to wait outside. After meditation he stretched himself down on a bed on the floor, called in the waiting disciple, and asked him to fan his head. Nearly an hour passed when the disciple noticed his hands shaking a little. Then came two deep breaths. And that was the end. It was just past 9 p.m. on the 4th of July 1902. He had reached the age of thirty-nine years, five months and twenty-four days. At about that time, a disembodied voice announced in a dream to Swami Ramakrishnananda who was then at Madras, "O Sashi! Look, as one spits out, so have I left my body just now."

Thus was the curtain drawn on the life of this illustrious spiritual Son and Apostle of Sri Ramakrishna, of whom Subhashchandra Bose has said, "He was so great, so profound, so complex. A Yogi of the highest spiritual level in direct communion with the Truth, who had, for the time being, consecrated his whole life to the moral and spiritual uplift of his nation and of humanity—that is how I would describe him. If he had been alive, I would have been at his feet. Modern India is his creation—if I err not." But Vivekananda has no death in a spiritual sense. For there stands the ringing declaration that he made long before his end, "It may be that I shall find it good to get outside my body—to cast it off like a worn-out garment. But I shall not cease to work. I shall inspire men everywhere until the world shall know that it is one with God!" For, be it remembered that he, the commissioned of the Lord, scorned Mukti for himself until he could lead all beings to its portals.

CHAPTER II

THE LEGACY OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

Introductory

Swami Vivekananda lived on this earthly sphere for thirty nine and a half years, of which nearly ten years alone were devoted to works of public significance. He took the world by storm at the Parliament of Religions at Chicago, and since then spent himself unsparingly in spreading the message of Vedanta among mankind. Was this meteoric career only a passing fanfare, or did it leave any abiding results—a legacy to India and the world at large?

At the very outset, it has to be pointed out that Swamiji's life and work have a twofold significance. On the one hand he is the first great leader, spearheading the modern Indian resurgence and giving the clarion call to his people to rouse themselves up from the slumber of slavery and work for the nation's uplift. He was, on the other hand, an Acharya, a preacher of

Vedanta whose message of salvation from the cycle of recurring births and deaths is of world-wide import and makes no distinction of country or nation or religion. The legacy which Swamiji has left pertains to both these fields—service and salvation of the soul.

Swami Vivekananda as the morning star of Indian independence

At the time when Swami Vivekananda appeared, India was under the stunning effect of the triumph of a company of English merchants over what was conceived to be the invincible might of the Moghul Empire and the powers that came into importance during its decadence. The defeat was not merely military and political, but cultural too. The institutions of the West which gave the English this superior might must have overwhelming excellences—thought the Indian of those days. In science and the modern system of social and political organisation, the learned men of those days recognised the factors of Western superiority. While there is much truth in this, the reaction of the Indian mind to this discovery was not all healthy. In place of correcting our mistakes, the reformers began a virulent attack on Indian social system and religion, and a tendency arose among them to condemn the whole of India's cultural past and to take to an imitation of the West. It was forgotten by the reformers that to cut at the root of national self-consciousness and self-confidence will lead only to the growth of an inferiority complex, and not to any positive development. Besides, they also forgot that Indian culture need not be apologetic. While it is true that there are many social institutions and habits of thought that need radical change, India's spiritual achievements are head and shoulders above those of other people. Therein consists the vitality of the race, and to make it healthy and vigorous, is the basic need of national development in other respects. It was the neglect of spiritual values that has led to our decadence and stagnation in other fields also. In place of rectifying the basic defect, merely carrying on a tirade against India's cultural past and social institutions will only be counter-productive.

Swami Vivekananda's appearance was the main force that arrested this trend of national self-condemnation and self-denigration. In those days a favourable view expressed by a Westerner about an Indian or an Indian system of thought, was taken as an unchallengeable certificate about their excellence. So when Swamiji, an unknown Sannyasin, unsupported by funds or any influential organised body, received an ovation in the Parliament of Religions that eclipsed what any Western savant or church dignitary received in his own land, it was sufficient proof of his greatness and of what he stood for, in the eyes of the people of those days. Besides, the continued success of the Swami's teachings in the States and in England and his success in winning several disciples and admirers in those countries, was an eye-opener to the Hindus hypnotised by the glare of Western civilisation. It came home to the imitation-minded Hindus that India was not such a culturally bankrupt country as they thought and that their scriptures had something that the world was in great need of.

The public enthusiasm had been worked up to such intensity by the news of the Swami's surprising success, that mammoth crowds of a size that the country had not known before gathered to honour him and hear him when he returned to India. The whole of his journey from Colombo to Almora had the appearance of a national revival, and not merely that of honouring a religious personality. After the establishment of British power, this was the first stirring of the spirit of nationalism in India, which was finally to end through successive stages in Indian independence in 1947. Thus Swamiji was the Morning Star of Indian independence.

Restoration of national self-respect

The message he gave at these mammoth meetings went to enhance and stabilise this sense of national self-respect which his appearance had evoked. A brief summary of these ideas has already been given in this booklet earlier (p. 90) and therefore they need no repetition. What he sought through these lectures was to restore to India her national self-confidence that she seemed to have lost under foreign domination. India, he taught, is not a dying nation, but a living entity with a message to the nations of the world. Every great nation that has played a part in the drama of world civilisation had specialised in some distinct field of life and made a contribution in that field to the progress of mankind. The study of human history shows that every nation lives to make its contribution in its chosen field for the general advancement of humanity, and when due to decadence and degeneration, it has ceased to fulfil its function, Nature has effaced it to make way for more vigorous and younger races to take up the role. For, it is Nature's practice to get rid of an atrophied part of an organism and let others take up its function. The various ancient peoples who began their national life with India, or before or after her, and lived for values like military might, political organisation, artistic excellence etc., have all passed away from world history after exhibiting themselves in all their brilliance for some time, because they have ceased to be vigorous enough to fulfil their national role any more! India, among all these ancient nations, has taken spirituality as its national theme, and has been ministering to the spiritual needs of mankind directly or indirectly all through the millennia of her history. Her capacity to produce spiritual giants continues up to this day. For witness the phenomenon of a Ramakrishna so close to our times, besides several other spiritual luminaries. The idea that spiritual verities like the Atman and God spoken of in religion are not mere matters of belief but of actual realisation, is still a powerful motivation in the minds of the Indian people. The holy places and temples located all over the country are even now attracting increasing crowds of devotees. A social continuity from Vedic times to this day still persists, and several practices and prayers of those ancient days still prevail.

This continuity of Indian society and culture, in spite of the changes that time has brought about, is a unique phenomenon of history. This has to be accounted for. If Indians were really a dead or a dying people, as Westernised reformers of those days pictured, why has their society not gone to oblivion along with the ancient peoples like the Egyptians, Iranians, Assyrians, Greeks, Romans etc., and how have they been able to produce spiritual geniuses and men of realisation even in these days? The answer, as Swami Vivekananda pointed out from his understanding of comparative history, is that the people of India still retain their spiritual genius even in the midst of their abject political and economic downfall, and that they have still a vital part to play in the life of the world community, India being the spiritual Guru of mankind. So Swami Vivekananda exhorted his countrymen to feel a healthy pride in their past—not to get stuck up there in the mire of vain self-glorification—but to be spurred along the path of virtue and spiritual service of mankind. He also warned that if India abandoned her spiritual role and took to the pursuit of mere materialistic values, she would be losing her national character and identity, and would be sharing the fate of all other ancient nations, namely, consignment into the limbo of oblivion.

The message of fervent patriotism

While thus reminding Indians of their noble role in world-history and the world's future welfare, Swamiji was never tired of pointing out to them their deficiencies, without remedying which India cannot rise to her full stature. The first of these was patriotism based upon the feeling that all Indians, despite differences in language, religion or region, form one united nation. In one of his noble perorations he declares: "Oh India! With this mere echoing of others, with this base imitation of others, with this dependence on others, this slavish weakness, this vile detestable cruelty—wouldst thou, with these provisions only, scale the highest pinnacle of civilisation and greatness? Wouldst thou attain by means of thy disgraceful cowardice, that freedom deserved only by the brave and the heroic? O India! Forget not—that the ideal of thy womanhood is Sita, Savitri, Damayanti; forget not—that the God thou worshippest is the great ascetic of ascetics, the all-renouncing Sankara, the Lord of Uma; forget not—that Thy marriage, thy wealth, thy life are not for sense-pleasures, are not for thy individual happiness; forget not—that thou art born as a sacrifice to the Mother's altar; forget not that thy social order is but the reflex of the Infinite Universal Motherhood; forget not—that the lower classes, the ignorant, the poor, the illiterate, the cobbler, the sweeper are thy flesh and blood, thy brothers. Thou brave one, be bold, take courage, be proud that thou art an Indian—and proudly proclaim; 'I am an Indian, every Indian is my brother.' Say: 'The ignorant Indian, the poor and destitute Indian, the Brahmin Indian, the Pariah Indian, is my brother.' Thou too clad with but a rag round thy loins proudly proclaim at the top of thy voice: 'The Indian is my brother—the Indian is my life, India's gods and goddesses are my God, India's society is the cradle of my infancy, the pleasure-garden of my youth, the sacred heaven, the Varanasi of my old age." Say brother: 'The soil of India is my highest heaven, the good of India is my good, and repeat and pray day and night, 'O Thou Lord of Gauri, O Thou Mother of the Universe, vouchsafe manliness unto me! O Thou Mother of Strength, take away my weakness, take away my unmanliness, and—make me a man!'

Swamiji as the prophet of Indian Independence

India had a sense of cultural unity from very ancient times, but the sentiment that its diverse people with different ethnic, linguistic and historical backgrounds form one nation took a definite shape only after the whole of India became a single political unit under British rule. A common link language was provided by English, which, together with rapid means of communication and an interlinked administrative system for the whole country, was beginning to bring different regions of India into a sense of sharing a common destiny. The rapid downfall of time-honoured empires and the triumph of a foreign power over a disunited geographical expression had brought home to the thoughtful, the lesson that united we stand but divided we fall. In the creation and strengthening of this national sentiment, Swami Vivekananda was the pioneer. Never before Swamiji's appearance had India got one whom all the people from the Cape Comorin to the Himalayas could recognise as their man—in whom they could find a lens, as it were, wherein the diversities of their existence could get focussed into the burning blaze of a patriotic unity. This was further enhanced by his uncompromising assertion of the glory and worthiness of India's past and of the mission of effecting the spiritual regeneration of the world that awaits her in future.

Swamiji kept himself strictly aloof from politics, but still the national sentiment and patriotic urge that he generated made many political thinkers and activists believe that Swami Vivekananda's aim was India's political freedom, and that his religious role was a smoke-screen to hide his real aim from the British Government. The revolutionaries quoted him in their secret propaganda and many groups of people, especially in Bengal, were eagerly awaiting the launching of his subtly conceived plan for Indian independence.

Apart from the distorted notions of the above-mentioned types of people, most of the great leaders of India's struggle for independence in the Gandhian era were indebted to Swamiji's life and work for receiving inspiration in the fight for India's independence. Mahatma Gandhi himself spoke at a birthday celebration of Swamiji thus: "I have come here (the Belur Math) to pay my homage and respect to the revered memory of Swami Vivekananda, whose birthday is being celebrated today (1923). I have gone through his works very thoroughly, and after having gone through them, the love that I had for my country became thousandfold. I ask you, young men, not to go empty-handed, without imbibing something of the spirit of the place where Swami Vivekananda lived and died."

In the view of Sri Aurobindo, " The going forth of Swami Vivekananda was the first visible sign to the world that India was awake not only to survive but to conquer. Vivekananda was the soul of puissance, a very lion among men. We perceive his influence still working gigantically, something leonine, grand, intuitive, upheaving that has entered into the soul of India and we say, 'Behold! Vivekananda still lives in the soul of his motherland and in the soul of her children.' "

Jawaharlal Nehru expresses his estimate of Swamiji's contribution to Indian national movement thus: "What Swamiji has written and said is of interest to us and is likely to influence us for a long time to come. He was no politician in the ordinary sense of the word, and yet he was, I think, one of the great founders—if you like, you may use any other word—of the modern national movement of India, and a great number of people, who took more or less an active part in that movement on a later date drew their inspiration from Swami Vivekananda. Directly or indirectly he has powerfully influenced India of today. And I think that our younger generation will take advantage of this fountain of wisdom, of spirit and fire, that flows through Swami Vivekananda". The view of Subhas Bose on this subject has already been quoted.

Swamiji as the prophet of mass awakening

There are, however, some communistically-minded historians and publicists of today who belittle Swamiji's work, describing it as a kind of revivalism and retrograde movement towards what they consider the bourgeois past of India. There is no wonder in their doing so, because their theory of history compels them to distort facts and interpret them in the light of Marxian ideology which is dogmatically held by them to be like a scripture. When they are bent on denigrating the whole of India's past for justifying their theories, where is the wonder in their disparaging Swamiji and his work? Just as the 19th century reformers were slaves of the Western thinkers of those times, these modern leftists are the uncritical camp-followers of Marx, Lenin and Mao. But they little realise that, if the uplift of the masses and the passing of power into the hands of the common man, are the ends of healthy nationalism, Swami Vivekananda was in no way inferior to them in his zeal for these ideas. He was the first great Indian to declare that he was a socialist, not, as he added, because socialism is a perfect system, but because various other ideologies have been given a trial without much success, and this new ideology therefore deserves a trial.

Readers of Swamiji's literature are aware of his theory that we are on the threshold of Sudrayuga—the age in which the Sudra or the mass-man will assume power as mass-man, reflecting all his virtues and failings in his dominance. He views history as a process in which the Brahmana or the priest, the Kshatriya or the war-like aristocrat, and Vaisya the representative of commercialism and money power, and the

Sudra or the mass-man, in that order, will gain power and determines the nature and course of civilisation. In the present age the mass-man is coming into power. This amounts to what in the communist jargon is called the dictatorship of the proletariat. As far as the improvement of the economic welfare and social and political status of the masses is concerned, Swamiji's ideal is fully in agreement with that of the socialists minus the metaphysics of dialectical materialism and class war of Marxist socialism.

Swamiji always held that the uplift of the masses is the basic pre-condition for building up the great India of the future that his fervent patriotism visualised. In the following vibrant passage, which no confirmed Marxist enthusiast for the masses can excel in its power and sincerity, he declares: "However much you may parade your descent from Aryan ancestors and sing the glories of ancient India day and night, and however much you may be strutting in the pride of your birth, you, the upper classes of India, do you think you are alive? You are but fossils ten thousand years old. It is among those whom your ancestors despised as 'walking carrion' that the little of vitality there is still in India is to be found; and it is you who are the real walking corpses! Your houses, your furniture, look like museum specimens, so lifeless and antiquated they are; and even an eye-witness of your manners and customs, your movements and modes of life, is inclined to think that he is listening to a grandmother's tale! When, even after making a personal acquaintance with you, one returns home, one seems to think one had been to visit the painting in an art gallery! In this world of Maya you are the real illusions, the mystery, the real mirage in the desert, you, the upper classes of India! You represent the past tense with all its varieties of form jumbled into one. That one still seems to see you at the present time, is nothing but a nightmare brought on by indigestion. You are the void, the unsubstantial non-entities of the future. Denizens of the dream land, why are you loitering any longer? Fleshless and bloodless skeletons of the dead body of past India you are, why do you not quickly reduce yourselves into dust and disappear in the air? Ay, on your bony fingers are some priceless rings of jewel, treasured up by your ancestors, and within the embrace of your stinking corpses are preserved a good many ancient treasure-chests. Up to now you have not had the opportunity to hand them over. Now under the British rule, in these days of free education and enlightenment, pass them on to your heirs, ay, do it as quickly as you can. And you merge yourselves in the void, and disappear; and let New-India arise in your place. Let her arise—out of the peasants' cottage, grasping the plough; out of the huts of the fishermen, the cobbler, and the sweeper. Let her spring from the grocer's shop, from beside the oven of the fritter-seller. Let them emanate from the factory, from marts and from markets. Let her emerge from groves and forests, from hills and mountains. These people have suffered oppression for thousands of years—suffered it without murmur, and as a result have got wonderful fortitude. They have suffered eternal misery, which has given them unflinching vitality. Living on a handful of grain, they can convulse the world; give them only half a piece of bread, and the whole world will not be big enough to contain their energy; they are endowed with the inexhaustible vitality of a Rakta-bija. And besides, they have got the wonderful strength that comes of a pure and moral life, which is not to be found anywhere else in the world. Such peacefulness, such contentment, such love, such power of silent and incessant work, and such manifestation of a lion's strength in times of action—where else will you find these? Skeletons of the past! There before you are your successors, the India that is to be. Throw those treasure chests of yours and those jewelled rings among them, as soon as you can; and you vanish into the air, and be seen no more; only keep your ears open. No sooner will you disappear than you will hear the inaugural shout of Renaissant India, ringing with the voice of a million thunders and reverberating throughout the universe, 'Wah Guru Ki Fateh '—Hail unto the Guru! "

Spirituality as the spring-board of Swamiji's patriotism and love of the masses

But let no one imagine from this that he would have had any truck with the present day Marxist ideology which seeks to annihilate the ancient culture of India based on the acceptance of man's spiritual worth, or to brain-wash the people with purely materialistic ideologies undermining their faith in God, soul and the hereafter, or to make them prone to violence and unpatriotic activities in the name of class-war and dictatorship of the proletariat.

Nor was his patriotism based upon the sentiment: 'My country right or wrong.' His love of country and the Indian masses had their foundation in his humanism, which in turn was rooted in his conviction that man is basically a spirit evolving towards a Divine destiny which he expressed in his now famous dictum: 'Every soul is potentially Divine; the goal of life is to manifest that Divinity by controlling Nature within and without.' The links between these four values—Swami Vivekananda's love of the masses, his love of his country, his humanism and his spirituality—have to be worked out and understood in their proper relation, if Swami Vivekananda's contribution to the world is not to be misconceived and misinterpreted. For, Swamiji's message has to be taken comprehensively and not fragmentarily, picking and choosing only whatever one wants for one's purpose. A patriot's love of his country is exclusive. He wants his country to attain to a high standard of living even at the expenses of others. He works to make his country strong and powerful and gain dominance over other people. Patriotism is thus usually based upon national selfishness. In the case of the Socialist or Communist, though he preaches internationalism, he has in practice all the failings of narrow patriotism, besides what is contributed by the special craze for materialism, class war and extermination of the bourgeois.

But Swami Vivekananda's love of India and of its masses was entirely different in origin. He loved India because he believed, as we have already shown, that India has a special genius for realising spiritual verities, and has been the spiritual Guru of mankind in the past and has to play the same role in the future also. That is why, according to him, she has lived to this day through very critical vicissitudes unlike other ancient peoples. This contribution which India alone can make, is an urgent need of mankind, if the world is to be saved from cultural degradation and destruction. And he warned the nation time after time that if she gave up her spiritual role, caught in the glare of materialistic achievements, she would die as a nation, having no national character or world purpose to serve any more. There are however many prophets of doom who, viewing the erosion of moral values in the present democractic India, consider this country as already decadent and dead awaiting only an elegy to be written over her. To them come the challenging words of Swami Vivekananda charged with the fervour of conviction born of his first-hand knowledge of the culture of India and of the West as also of the life of all classes of people of his country and of the world at large. "And will she die—this old Mother of all that is noble or moral or spiritual, the land which the sages trod, the land in which godlike men still live and breathe? I will borrow the lantern of the Athenian sage and follow you, my brother, through the cities and villages, plains and forests, of this broad world—show me such men in other lands if you can. Truly have they said, the tree is known by its fruits. Go under every mango tree in India ; pick up baskets of the worm-eaten unripe, fallen ones from the ground, and write hundreds of the most learned volumes on each of them—still you have not described a single mango. Pluck a luscious, full-grown, juicy one from the tree, and you have known all that the mango is.

"Similarly, these Man-gods show what the Hindu religion is. They show the character, the power, and the possibilities of that racial tree which counts culture by centuries, and has borne the buffets of a thousand years of hurricane, and still stands with the unimpaired vigour of eternal youth.

"Shall India die? Then from the world all spirituality will be extinct, all moral perfection will be extinct, all sweet-souled sympathy for religion will be extinct, all ideality will be extinct. And in its place will reign the duality of lust and luxury as its male and female deities, with money as its priest, fraud, force and competition its ceremonies, and the human soul its sacrifice. Such a thing can never be. The power of suffering is infinitely greater than the power of doing; the power of love is of infinitely greater potency than the power of hatred. Those who think that the present revival of Hinduism is only a manifestation of patriotic impulse are deluded."

Thus it will be seen that Swami Vivekananda's love of India was entirely different in quality from that of a political patriot, whose aim does not generally extend beyond capturing power and raising the standard of living of his people without reference to any higher purpose in life. His patriotism was based on his humanism, which in turn was rooted in his conviction that every soul is potentially divine and that the goal of life is to manifest that Divinity. He expressed this idea of his in a pithy statement, " What is England or India to us who are the servants of that God whom the ignorant call 'man' ?"

Material development as all-important in a scheme of total human development.

Did he not then care for the material development of India? Did he want all and sundry to shut themselves up in caves and practise a kind of pseudo-meditation? Far from it. None stressed more emphatically than he that real meditation is only for the strong and the healthy. The thunder of his words is heard in the Upanishadic dictum. "*Na'yam atma balahinena labhyah*—this Atman cannot be attained by one devoid of strength." Eradication of poverty and illiteracy occupied therefore the first place in his scheme of national reconstruction. So also the eradication of untouchability, of glaring social and economic inequalities, and the uplift of the masses were as much vital to his scheme of national reconstruction as the study of the scriptures and the practice of spiritual disciplines.

A cynical critic may ask: Why economic uplift and social improvement ? And why strength? Does not spirituality imply other-worldliness,starving of the body and practice of humility? No, it is this misconceived idea of spirituality, this pseudo-other-worldliness and apotheosis of false humility and self-abasement that has spelt disaster to India in the past. Swami Vivekananda has no truck with these. Renunciation of worldly values mistakenly called other worldliness, does not mean impotent submission to the wretchedness of poverty. It springs, on the other hand, from the perception of the fleeting and trivial nature of worldly values, as illustrated in the Upanishadic story of Nachiketas, wherein Nachiketas is offered all the wealth of the world if he would not persist in his spiritual enquiry, but Nachiketas prefers the values of the spirit to the fleeting glory of wealth or the self-paralysing delights of sense enjoyments. So also true humility is not pusillanimous self-abasement that goes under that name, but the offspring of a vivid perception of the transcendent glory of God, just like Newton's feeling of himself as a child picking up a few shells from the limitless sea-shore of Nature's mysteries. These two values of renunciation and humility are collectively embodied in their correct form in Swami Vivekananda's doctrine of strength as the cardinal virtue—strength not of the kind idealised by Nietzsche, which culminated in Hitler's theory of the master-race whose right it is to dominate and bully all mankind, but the strength that leads one to the Atman, which is inclusive of strength in all its forms, physical, mental, intellectual and spiritual.

Swami Vivekananda is often described as the prophet of strength and fearlessness.

Timidity and pusillanimous self-abasement were anathema to him. The highest source of strength and fearlessness is according to him, the conviction that one is the basically infinite, deathless and blissful Self. The quality of this sentiment is not different from the corresponding sentiment of devotees with firm faith in and devotion to God. A Prahlada and a Nag Mahashay, who are pure devotees, are not a whit less in these qualities of strength and fearlessness, though they may talk the language of self-abasement born of their vivid consciousness of Divine majesty. So when Swami Vivekananda exalted renunciation, strength, fearlessness, self-confidence etc, he was in line with the authentic spiritual tradition of India, however incompatible they may look to persons who choose to misunderstand them.

Spirituality as the link between his patriotism and humanism.

To resume the discussion about the link between the patriotic fervour and the urge for the uplift of the masses and eradication of India's poverty: It consists in his conviction that India will have the competence to deliver her spiritual message to the world only when the physique and the mind of her people develop to a higher standard of excellence through proper feeding and education. Poverty and ignorance are not necessary condition of spirituality. They are its dampers. In a weak body and superstition-ridden mind there is little chance of spiritual development. India's spiritual genius cannot flourish fully and make a powerful impact on the world until the social life is well organised, the masses become educated, and the standard of living is raised above the poverty line. What he longed for was not an endless pursuit, as in many so-called advanced countries of today, of higher and higher standards of living and sophistication of life pattern, but the provision of the minimum requirements for a healthy and contented life which alone can provide man with the leisure and reserve of mental energy required for the pursuit of spiritual values. An environment neither of extreme enjoyment nor of base indigence and misery can generate Vairagya or revulsion and non-attachment for the fleeting worldly values. Only a *via media* in the social and economic situation can foster discrimination (Viveka), the parent of renunciation and spiritual aspiration, and thus favour the rise of impressive men of spiritual genius who can deliver the saving Gospel, the message of India, to the young and powerful nations of the world. Those who do not understand this basic urge of Swami Vivekananda in his expression of passionate patriotism and championship of the cause of the masses, but think of him merely as a patriotic freedom-fighter or a covert Communist thinker, give the grossest misrepresentation of him. He was above all the closest follower and chosen disciple of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna, and everything Swamiji spoke and did has to be interpreted against this background of his. As Subhash Bose has correctly put it: "He was a Yogi of the highest spiritual level in direct communion with the Truth, who had, for the time being, consecrated his whole life to the moral and spiritual uplift of his nation and of humanity."

Swamiji as an Acharya of the whole world

Swami Vivekananda is often described as the Patriot-Saint of India. This description is no doubt correct in the light explained above. But we in India are too often prone to stress his patriotism and service to India, forgetting that the world as a whole, especially the West, has in one respect a greater claim on him. Of his nearly nine years and nine months of active public life, about five years and a half were spent in the West, and that was the best period of his life, during which he spent himself in untiring activity and vast productivity. Of the eight volumes of his published works, nearly seven comprise the lectures he delivered in the West, and that in English—a language that is fast becoming the world language. In place of looking at Swamiji from the narrow standpoint of India, we have to see him in the world perspective, if we are to have a due perception of the scope of his message.

He was first and foremost an Acharya (a spiritual teacher) of the Universal Gospel of Vedanta, no less in authenticity than the great ones of the past like Sankara and Ramanuja, although he has not written commentaries on the Vedanta Sutras and the Upanishads in the pattern of the other Bhashyakaras (scriptural exegesists). But there is a difference between them and him—a difference that is of great significance. In all their writings and peripatetic tours, the revered Acharyas of old had in view only the Sanskrit-knowing elite of India, living within the borders of this country and adhering nominally at least to the Varnashrama system of society. But Swami Vivekananda disentangled Vedanta, the perennial philosophy from its Varnashrama setting and ethnic superimpositions, and interpreted it as the truly perennial and universal gospel, a religion relevant to all mankind. Some people ask the question why Swami Vivekananda, who was such a great patriotic Indian and a paragon of Vedantic wisdom, preached mostly in the materialistic West and not on India's sacred soil in Sanskrit. The answer is obvious. The world language today is not Sanskrit but English, and the world platforms are not in Varanasi, Ujjaini and Kanchi, but in Chicago, New York and

London. That he spoke in English to Western audiences uninitiated into Vedantic tradition and technicalities, has proved a boon to all humanity including Indians. He was for this very reason obliged to release Vedanta from its imprisonment by our redoubtable Pandits in impregnable logical cells like Jahallakshana, Ajahal-lakshna and Jahadajahal-lakshna, and to extend its frontiers beyond the limits set by the discovery of the locus of Avidya, the definition of Mithyatva, the supremacy of Sabdapramana, the incompatibility between work and knowledge, and a host of similar technicalities of Vedantic scholasticism.

There are Indian Pandits and Professors of Philosophy who would not for this very reason give for him the dignified rank of a Philosopher, just as there are political light-weights who minimise his importance as a nation-builder. This mentality is the product of the tendency among Indian thinkers of later times to disengage philosophy from its alliance with life and confine it to the pure realm of abstractions and complicated logical categories. But all liberal thinkers of world-wide reputation have recognised in Swami Vivekananda a very significant expression of the creative genius of India. An illustrious name in this connection is that of Romain Rolland who has in the middle of this century devoted a whole volume to the study of Swami Vivekananda and his thought. That forward-looking nations consider Swami Vivekananda's thought as very significant is indicated by a recent publication of the Beijing University in the Chinese language on Indian Philosophy by Huang Zin Chung, Deputy Director of South Asian Studies, with special emphasis on Swami Vivekananda among the philosophers dealt with in the book.

The nature and scope of his works

The nature and scope of his works are best described in the following words of his own, occurring in a letter he addressed to his dear disciple Alasinga Perumal: "To put the Hindu ideas into English and then make out of dry philosophy and intricate mythology and queer startling psychology, a religion which shall be easy, simple, popular, and at the same time meet the requirements of the highest minds—is a task only those can understand who have attempted it. The abstract Advaita must become living—poetic—in everyday life; out of hopelessly intricate mythology must come concrete moral forms; and out of bewildering Yogism must come the most scientific and practical psychology—and all this must be put in a form so that a child may grasp it. That is my life's work."

As a result we have got in the eight volumes of his works an indirect but authentic commentary on the scriptures of the Vedanta put in a form that is understandable and acceptable to any man of average intelligence and education, be he of the East or the West. Free from technicalities, his expositions are forceful, clear and profound, and in conformity with the modern historical sense and scientific thought. As Sister Nivedita has said in her estimate of them; "In the four (now eight) volumes of the works of Swami Vivekananda .. we have what is not merely a Gospel to the world at large, but also to its own children, the charter of the Hindu Faith. What Hinduism needed, amidst the general disintegration of the modern era, was a rock where she could lie at anchor, an authoritative utterance in which she might recognise her self. And this was given to her, in these words and writings of Swami Vivekananda. For the first time in history, as has been said elsewhere, Hinduism itself forms here the subject of generalisation by a Hindu mind of the highest order. For ages to come, the Hindu man who would verify, the Hindu mother who would teach her children, what was the faith of their ancestors, will turn to the pages of these books for assurance and light. Long after the English language has disappeared from India, the gift that has been made through that language to the world, will remain and bear its fruits in the East and the West alike."

His contribution to Vedantic thought

To go into the details of these works is not within the scope of a small brochure like this, as Swamiji's works include within their scope the whole of Vedic revelation and all its elaborations that have taken place up to date. But a few striking features of what comtitutes the contribution of his genius, may be noted in brief.

1. He defined Veda, the *Sabdapramana* (Scriptural authority) of the scholastics, as eternal laws of the spiritual realm, like the scientific laws of the material world. It is in this sense that the Veda is eternal, and *Apaurusheya*, (not man-made) the Rishis being only discoverers of the law, just as the scientific discoverers are only discoverers of pre-existing laws of Nature. Thus he freed the *Sabdapramana* of the Vedantins from the encrustations of scholasticism, which made it incomprehensible to those who are unacquainted with the Mimamsaka technicalities.

2. He maintained that the Vedic revelation includes in its scope all stages of man's spiritual evolution, which are known to Indian thinkers as dualism (Dvaita), qualified monism (Visishta-advaita) and monism (Advaita). They are not mutually conflicting as was supposed to be in the past, but complementary to one another, one leading to the other with man's spiritual evolution. All cults forming the core of world religion can be accommodated within this frame work.

3. He separated the spiritual content of Vedic revelation from the setting of Varnas-

hrama social system in which it was embedded and used to be expounded in the past, and presented it as the universal philosophy of religion applicable to all creeds, cults, societies and countries.

4. He presented the Supreme Being as Personal-Impersonal. The Impersonal is not the negation or falsification of the Personal but the fulfilment of It—a necessary implication in the conception of It for assuring Its validity. All the ideas of the Supreme Being comprised in the conceptions of Him as the Other, the Immanent and the Non-dual are true and valid from their respective points of view or levels of reference adopted. They are like photographs of the sun taken from different levels, all of them being versions of the same entity complementary to one another.

5. Anthropomorphism is an unavoidable element in all such human conceptions of God. It is even so with scientific knowledge, because the reading and interpretation of the data of science are done by the human mind. In philosophic monotheism, where the theologian still looks upon God as the Other, there is always the need for an anti-God, a Devil or Satan to account for evil.

When monotheism rises to the level of an Immanent Deity, He is perceived as the source of both Vidya and Avidya, of the liberating forces of good and of the binding forces of evil, of beauty and of awe, of life and of death—in fact of the functions of both a God and a Devil. When unitary consciousness is realised, the ethical dualism of good and evil disappears,

This state of mind wherein the polarisation of the ethical sense is overcome, the Swami put once in a forthright way in one his of talks in the West, sending waves of shock through the minds of his cultured audience. He said: "....we should look upon man in the most charitable light. It is not so easy to be good. What are you but mere machines until you are free? Should you be proud because you are good! Certainly not. You are good because you cannot help it. If you are in his position, who knows what you would have been? The woman in the street, or the thief in the jail, is the Christ that is being sacrificed that you may be a good man. Such is the law of balance. All the thieves and the murderers, all the unjust, the weakest, the wickedest, the devils, they are all my Christ! That is my doctrine. I cannot help it. My salutation goes to the feet of the good, the saintly, and to the feet of the devilish!. They are all my teachers, all are my spiritual fathers, all are my saviours. I may curse one and yet benefit by his failings; I may bless another and benefit by his good deeds. This is as true as I stand here. I have to sneer at the woman walking in the street, because society wants it. She, my saviour, she whose street-walking is the cause of the chastity of other women! Think of that! Think, men and women, of this question in your mind. It is a truth—a bare bold truth! As I see more of the world, see more of men and women, this conviction grows stronger. Whom shall I blame? Whom shall I praise? Both sides of the shield must be seen."

6. *Tat tvam asi*—That Thou art—is the cryptic statement made of the relation between the Jiva and Iswara in Vedanta. The pure Advaita Vedanta interprets it as meaning by implication that the Jiva and Iswara are identical as Brahman, when their Upadhis or adjuncts are eliminated. The qualified Advaitins admit identity as inseparable oneness of parts in the Organic

Whole constituted of Jagat (world), Jiva (soul) and Iswara (God), collectively known as Brahman. The pure Dualists negate identity, but maintain that the Jiva is an entity which has no existence independent of Brahman. Swami Vivekananda accepted all these schools of Vedanta as valid, as different points of view according to the development of man's spiritual insight. He has not anywhere indulged in the logical discussions of *Tat tvam asi* like the great Acharyas of the past, as he was concerned more with the practicality of Vedanta than its verbal logicality. In place of entering into interminable logical quibbles, he interpreted this Vedantic dictum to mean—"Every soul is potentially Divine." Swamiji maintains this doctrine as the sheet-anchor of Vedanta. 'Potential' means that, though a Jiva appears now in the state of ignorance as a weak and inconsequential entity as against the mighty Nature, it has got the capacity in it to gradually evolve to higher and higher states and attain to the Divine status, in whatever way you may define that status from the logical point of view. It is just like this: a spark of fire may look small and insignificant, but it has got all the potentialities of a mighty conflagration. Vedanta, Swamiji maintained, wants man to adopt measures for the actualisation of this potential Divine in him, and all the Sadhanas of Karma, Bhakti, Yoga and Jnana are meant for this purpose. Evolution at the physical level has achieved its end with the perfection of the human body. The next stages of evolution consist in the gradual development of this inherent Divinity. Human society and civilisation will become meaningful only through the acceptance of this Vedantic outlook, and its application to the individual and collective life of man. Thus Swamiji converted the great Vedantic dictum of *Tat tvam asi* from a jumble of logical disputation to the key to human development, individual and collective.

7. Although the Swami rose above any sectarian view of Vedanta, he often used the language and ideology of Advaita Vedanta in his lectures. We have seen the new turn he has given to several of its concepts like revelation, Karma, Jiva, Brahman, Mukti etc. Another important Vedantic concept on which he has spoken is the doctrine of Maya. The word Maya is used in different

meanings. In a theological sense it is the power of God, and this is very clearly stated in the Svetasvatara Upanishad. But in philosophical sections of the Upanishads like the Brihadaranyaka and Chandogya, it is vaguely implied in an ontological role when describing acosmism. But we do not find any clear formulation of it as a doctrine. In the hands of Buddhist thinkers, it got the meaning of an illusory appearance. Besides the idea of the power of God, Vedanta also absorbed a shade of this meaning of illusory appearance in its post-Buddhistic development. This new development was necessitated in Upanishadic thought, because in a doctrine of Reality as non-dual, an explanation has to be given for the experience of multiplicity by assigning to it some kind of ontological status. As it is actually experienced by all, to deny any reality to it and call it an illusion will be madness. So the world experience is called *bhava rupam* or something positive in nature, an intermediary reality. Yet it is described as neither *Sat* (real) nor *Asat* (unreal) nor a combination of both, and therefore fit to be called an indeterminate existence (*Anirvachaniya khyati*).

While the Advaitic thinkers interpret Maya in this way, they also use the analogy of rope in the snake and mirage in the desert, which are pure illusions, in describing Maya. How can the status of a relative or intermediary reality and also of an illusory appearance be given to the same entity? The answer given is that they are given from two stand-points—the former from that of ignorance or relative reality (*vyavahara*) while the latter is from that of enlightenment or ultimate reality (*paramartha*). The advocates of Advaita feel they have explained everything by this analysis of experience into these two contradictory levels. But the critics of Advaita are not satisfied with it, and they direct their broadsides in their controversy with Advaitins against *Maya-vada* and the double status of reality. This controversy has been so pronounced and longdrawn in the later development of polemical Vedanta, that the *Brahmavada* of the Upanishads has been eclipsed by the *Maya-vada* of philosophers.

Now where does Swami Vivekananda come amidst this endless controversial postures? An impartial but critical reader of his works will feel that his position is rather unclear. In many places he uses the analogy of 'rope in the snake' and 'mirage in the desert', but he does not do so when he systematically discusses the Maya theory in his three lectures on the subject in his Jnana Yoga. There he gives an original view. He says that Maya is not a theory or an explanation at all, but a statement of a fact—the fact that the world and its experiences are so ridden with contradictions that one cannot have an understanding of it and reconciliation with it logically or ethically. So man should direct his quest into what transcends it. Swamiji's position therefore seems to be that it is useless to enter into this endless controversy. On the other hand we must learn its spiritual implication, that it is vanity to be engrossed with the fleeting and trivial values of the world. So cultivate non-attachment and develop yearning for Truth.

It is also very significant that according to him man in spiritual matters is not going from error to truth, but growing from lower truth to higher truth. He illustrates this by the analogy of the photographs of the sun from different levels. The photos vary, but the one from a nearer level does not falsify the preceding one, but only represents a nearer approach to the same truth that they all embody. If this interpretation is accepted, *Vyavahara* and *Paramartha* cease to be contradictories with no middle ground between, but only contraries linked together by an ascending scale of values. In this view *Mithyatva* or falsity, is rid of the shadow of illusories cast on it by the analogies of the 'snake in the rope' and of 'water in the desert' in a mirage.

7. While accepting the traditional idea of Mukti as liberation from the cycle of births and deaths, he liberated the conception from a touch of escapism that surrounded it, by redefining it as the manifestation of the Divinity already latent in man. Perfection as opposed to escape from an unpleasant situation—he placed this as the ideal for competent aspirants.

8. In fact towards the latter part of his life he taught that there is no liberation until one ceases to want liberation; for seeking liberation is a selfish quest, and man does not reach perfection until he is able to overcome self-centredness completely. When once questioned about the characteristic of an Incarnation, he answered it indirectly,

stating that there was a time in his early life when the longing for Mukti was so strong in him that he once entered a cave and decided to fast and die there if he did not gain Mukti. But, he continued, the very thought of Mukti did not come to his mind now. It may be contended that his attitude had changed in this way because he had already attained Mukti. While that may be conceded, we have to recognise the point he wants to drive home — that the quest for Mukti should not become a self-centred quest like the striving for a possession or position. It should be a natural fulfilment resulting from the erosion of self-centredness through unselfish service, discrimination and self-discipline. He did not therefore pose any absolute opposition between work and knowledge (i.e. spiritual practice), as some Vedantic teachers do. This attitude of his springs from his novel interpretation of Pravritti and Nivritti based on the root meaning of the words. Pravritti literally means 'move toward', and Nivritti, 'move away from'. He therefore interpreted these two cardinal words —the first as 'moving towards the life of self-centredness' and the second as 'moving away from self-centredness' whereas the old Acharyas interpreted them as 'moving into involvement in work' and 'moving away from involvement in work.' So for the old Acharyas, the pursuit of Moksha meant cessation from all work ultimately, whereas for Swamiji it meant cessation from selfishness. So in his scheme of salvation unselfish work has an equal place of importance with other disciplines. He attached equal importance to all the four Yogas—Bhakti, Karma, Raja and Jnana Yogas—but he maintained that whether one followed any of them singly or in combination, one should always have a place for Karma, unselfish work, in one's scheme of spiritual discipline.

9. His outlook in these respects largely reflected his gradual leaning to the doctrine of Sarva-mukti—salvation as a collective achievement. In the Vedantic tradition this doctrine was first adumbrated by Appayya Dikshita. For Appayya Dikshita, however, it was more a theological necessity, as he was a champion of Eka-Jiva-Vada—the doctrine of the singleness of all Jivas. It means there is only one Jiva, Hiranyagarbha, who is reflected as many Jivas in different adjuncts (Upadhis). So all Jivas can, according to

him, attain Mukti only collectively with Hiranyagarbha at the end of the cosmic cycle when the term of Hiranyagarbha's life is over. For Swami Vivekananda, however, it was more a compulsion of the heart, parallel to the Buddhist doctrine of the Bodhisattva, according to which an aspirant, motivated by Mahakaruna or universal love, abandons his own Nirvana in order that he may work for the Nirvana of all labouring in the cycle of birth and death. The Swami has not elaborated this doctrine in any of his speeches, but has only expressed his preference for it in his discussions with disciples. He himself doubted the soundness of its metaphysics, but yet urged its acceptance, and expressed his own readiness to stand the sufferings of Samsara for all time in order to bring enlightenment to Jivas in bondage. Truly, as his Great Master foretold about him, he was like a tree standing all the heat of the sun, affording shelter from that heat to all who wished to come under its shadow.

10. His intense humanism also found expression in his doctrine of Practical Vedanta. Vedanta in the past was practical only for ascetics and recluses who sought

salvation by self-realisation. But Swamiji maintained that the fundamental doctrine of Vedanta, namely, the basic divinity of the Jiva, has a message for men in all stations of life. It can be an instrument for the re-education of the ego into a new consciousness of one's inherent strength, and thus promote man's self-confidence and power of self-expression. Next, practical Vedanta conveys the teaching that man is the best symbol for the worship of the Deity. While the Swami accepted prayer to the Deity and adoration of Him in temples and through meditation on Him as an essential part of spiritual discipline, he stressed that an equally important aspect of worship lies in the service of God in man. Thus a true Vedantin can work out a programme of education, health, social uplift etc., not merely as secular service, but as worship of God in man—a discipline equal to, if not more potent than, the traditionally accepted forms of worship. Thus for him the Yogas of Jnana, Bhakti and Karma become an integrated discipline.

11. In a small brochure like this, these profound doctrines cannot be elaborated more. The wide-ranging legacy he has

left for the world in the spiritual field cannot be better expressed than in the following aphoristic dicta of his:

> Each soul is potentially divine.
>
> The goal is to manifest this divine within by controlling Nature, external and internal.
>
> Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy, by one, or more, or all of these—and be free.
>
> This is the whole of religion. Doctrines, or dogmas, or rituals, or books, or temples, or forms, are but secondary details.

These can form the Neo-Brahmasutras, on which future Vedantic scholars can write commentaries.

The Ramakrishna Order of Monks

12. Apart from these legacies of a patriotic and doctrinal nature, Swami Vivekananda has left behind him a Sannyasin Order to carry on the work of spiritual ministry that his Great Master had inaugurated through his instrumentality. This Order is known as the Ramakrishna Order of Monks, and they form the body that

conducts the spiritual and service activities of the twin organisation known as the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission. The Monastic Order was practically formed at the sick bed of Sri Ramakrishna in his last days, and continued as a community of ascetics practising spiritual disciplines and going on holy wanderings until Swamiji returned from America. In the life section we have narrated in detail how Swamiji established the Ramakrishna Math, also known as the Belur Math, as the final resting place for the sacred Relics of Sri Ramakrishna, and as the centre for his monastic brethren and disciples to stay and perform His Service and spread His message, with the Math as their headquarters. He also founded the Ramakrishna Mission as a supplementary organisation, with membership open for householders also, to undertake especially works of service like conducting educational institutions, centres for medical service, relief operations and rural uplift work. The Monastic Order of Swamiji is open to all young men, within certain limits set by age and education only, who are inspired by devotion to the ideals of renunciation and service, and accept the personality and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna.

He gave the mystic conception that the Order is the body or the external instrument through which the Master is fulfilling the great spiritual ministry he started, and that by doing the work of the Order in an unselfish and dedicated spirit, one is adoring Him and doing His service. Swamiji thus created a new monastic tradition. Hindu Sannyasins in the past were expected to be *Karma-sannyasins* or persons who have abandoned all work, external and internal, which is called the path of *Nivritti*. But by the new definition that the Swami gave to *Nivritti* as withdrawal from self-centredness (*vide supra*), he brought all unselfish work of service of men in the spirit of adoring the Lord, within the limits of *Nivritti*. So the Sannyasins of the Order that Swamiji founded have to undertake works of service also along with the other forms of Sadhana. Thus he brought into being a form of Sadhana in which all the Yogas are integrated into one spiritual endeavour.

It has, however, to be stressed that the Sannyasins of this Order are not a body doing mere social service. In social service in the ordinary sense the external effect of it is the only objective. But here while the external results are important, the moral effect on the doer, his spiritual elevation, is equally, if not more, important. For, what Swamiji has commanded his monks, is to serve God in man, and not any mere conglomeration of human beings. Thus Swamiji has made Sannyasa a state of life having both a spiritual and social efficiency. In an age when human thought is becoming more and more this-worldly and socially oriented, Swamiji has saved Sannyasa by bringing it in line with modern tendencies, without at the same time reducing a whit its spiritual value. Though orthodox Sannyasins stood against this change at the time Swamiji initiated it, the current trends are that they too are moving towards it slowly. If all Sannyasin Orders follow this ideal, the Sannyasa institution will be saved, and it will become a great leavening force in society.

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